THE WORLD'S BEST ONE HUNDRED DETECTIVE STORIES

(IN TEN VOLUMES)

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VOLUME TWO

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THE WORLD'S BEST 100 DETECTIVE STORIES

F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

AN AFFAIR OF HONOR

MAJOR BRUCE, G. S. O. (Intelligence), Headquarters Staff of the strategically important Far Eastern base of Menangpore, was suddenly jerked out of the blissful Nirvana of his afternoon siesta to resumption of his temporarily forgotten identity. The telephone bell was ringing. He slid off his couch, in shirt and breeches, and went to the instrument.

"Hallo! Yes?" He listened. "Oh, hallo, Rolfe! What?—General wants to see me?—Right-o! I'll be along."

A minute or two later, girt once more in the official harness of Sam Browne over white tunic, his pith helmet large over his deep-tanned, efficient-looking features, he emerged from the shutter-darkened cool of his bungalow into the blinding glare of a 4 P.M. sun. He turned along the white road, inadequately shaded between its rows of stiff-fronded palms, which led, beyond the bungalows of the married officers, to Garrison Headquarters. A couple of native soldiers, solemnly stupid with a hose pipe, were getting gloriously wet as they changed its thick dust into mud that dried again behind them before they had moved on a dozen steps.

He frowned. But it was not at the two soldiers that he frowned. Beyond them, at the gate of one of the more distant palm-embosked bungalows, a rickshaw stood in readiness, was at that moment being entered by a lady

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clad in white from open parasol to shoe-tip. For an instant his pace slackened like that of a man instinctively impelled to turn back on his tracks, then he reaffirmed its briskness.

He and the rickshaw, now in movement, drew near to each other and, although he gazed determinedly in another direction, he had—he knew not how—a glimpse of her face above the bobbing head of the runner. Another moment, and she was abreast of him, the runner immobile at her prettily authoritative order.

"Frank!"

There was no help for it. Common courtesy exacted that he should stop, bring his hand up to his helmet in salute, school his voice to a polite ordinariness, conjure up some sort of smile.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Fanshaw." His eyes rested unwillingly on her face, its fresh young beauty yet unwilted by this tropic furnace. He felt, awkwardly, that he ought to say something more. "Isn't it too early for you to be out?" He kicked himself for the instinctive assumption of authority in his tone. "Better an hour later, you know," he added, in attenuation.

"I'm going to tea with the Padre's wife," she said, smiling at him, "and it's shade all the way. But I didn't stop you to explain that I'm not as mad as I look. I've already done that to Dick this afternoon. Frank!" her voice went serious, "come here! I want to talk to you."

He took a step nearer the rickshaw. "Well?"

"I've been waiting for a chance of a word alone with you for three months—ever since we came out—and you seem to be the one person I never meet except in a crowd."

"Yes?" he said, with a false innocence. He had seen to it, with a grim thoroughness, that they never should meet except in a crowd. "I've been pretty busy, you know."

Her eyes—such dear, honest eyes, they were!—caught his for a moment, looked into them.

"Frank!" she said. "I want—I've wanted all these three months—to—to ask you to forgive me. I treated you

badly, very badly, I know." She hesitated in the embarrassment of this avowal.

"That's all right," he muttered, looking away from her. "The best man won, I suppose."

She flushed a little, stopped herself—he could guess, as his glance came back to her—from saying, on a naïve impulse, how much she and Dick were in love with each other. He did not need her to tell him. He had observed it from his distance on the edge of the crowd, with eyes that could translate, self-torturingly acute, every touch and gesture that passed between her and her husband.

She broke the awkwardness of the pause. "We had no idea, Dick and I, when we married," she said, "that he would be sent to this station. He expected India."

"It's not your fault," he said, through his teeth. "It's just one of those little tricks that Fate plays upon people."

Her eyes went sympathetic.

"Perhaps Fate knows best," she said. "Frank—we've been pals even since I was in short frocks—won't you be friends still?"

"Of course," he managed to say, uncomfortably. "Of course."

"You won't bear a grudge? You'll still be the best pal I ever had? Shake hands on it?" Their eyes met, looked into each other's as she stretched out her hand to him. For one moment, as though he measured the gravity of what she asked of him, he looked into the candid beauty of her face, and then he reached up his hand to hers.

"I shake," he said, simply.

"And Dick?" she asked. "You'll be friends with him—real friends?"

He nodded. "If he wants me to."

"No. Whether he wants you to or not. For my sake. I can't be happy if I feel that my one bit of home out here is hostile to him. You promise?" She was exercising her old authority over him, the old authority of her charm that two years ago . . . He succumbed.

"All right," he said. "I promise. For your sake."

The sudden radiance of her face was—almost—full compensation.

"Thank you, Frank. That's all I want. You never broke your word in your life. You've made me so happy."

"I'm glad," he said. "And now," he smiled, "you've kept the general waiting!"

"Explain to him that you've done your day's kind action, and he'll forgive you. He's the dearest old soul, really. But I release you. You've promised—and you'll come and see us—not in a crowd?"

"I've promised," he said.

He saluted, and the coolie sped off along the white road with her. For one moment he stood looking after her parasol above the back of the rickshaw, and then he resumed his way. He took a deep chestful of the baking air, with incomplete relief, found himself quivering oddly. That first meeting, *tête-à-tête,* which he had so long dreaded, was over.

He went along the road with his surroundings fading out of reality. He was back in the dusk of an English summer evening, he and she together within the clump of willows that dropped slim fingers to the trout stream up which they had fished all day. He was trembling with the audacity of that utterance which all day he had been trying to phrase to himself with sufficient delicacy of approach, so freshly innocent of even suspecting it she seemed in her boy-like comradeship—that utterance which at last had burst from him, surprising him by its spontaneity, its almost brutal directness.

"By God, Nina—I'm sorry if I offend you—but I love you!"

And she had looked at him, and said nothing—until after he had kissed her, caught tight in his arms. And then she had whispered.

Two years ago! He had left her behind, pledged to be his wife, a miracle of newly perceived, almost awesome womanhood, intoxicating in her happy beauty, in her incredible reciprocation of his love, that he could scarcely identify with the little girl he had seen grow up in in-

terval to interval of leave from foreign service. He had come back to Menangpore to count off the days, to live through the three years—or it might be only two, if she came out to him—which he must endure until their marriage, endure with every fibre of his body craving for her, with his whole mind soaked in the thought of her.

They wrote, of course, by every mail—until that mail, eight months ago, which had brought the letter which had stunned him, so that since he had never felt himself really and fully alive. She had made a mistake—it had been that he had always been such a dear, good old pal—she had thought fondness—was—(she had knocked out that line without finishing it)—anyway, it was Major Fanshaw, home on leave from India, whom she was marrying, almost at once. He had seen an account of the ceremony in the *Times,* a little later. And then, for a supreme and savage irony, the humorously minded gods who whisper in the ears of the clerks of the A. G.'s Department at the War Office had sent Major Richard Fanshaw to join the Headquarters Staff, Menangpore. The same gods, nudging one another, had vetoed Major Francis Bruce's immediate application for a transfer.

Quite apart from this humiliating supersession, he did not greatly like Dick Fanshaw. In fact, no one in the garrison greatly liked him. The newcomer had not the knack of sociability. He was a thin-faced, reserved sort of man, absorbed in his own thoughts, alleged to be studious, efficient at his job, but quite useless on the polo field. It was a mystery beyond Bruce's comprehension how he and Nina had ever become intimate enough for even a proposal of marriage. Yet there was the fact—he had seen it with his own eyes—they were desperately, absorbedly, in love with each other.

Bah! He put the thing out of his mind. He'd promised Nina to be friendly with Fanshaw, and he'd do his best to be decent to him. If Fanshaw ever wanted a pal, he'd be handy—for Nina's sake.

He had arrived at the veranda of the white-painted Garrison Headquarters, and turned, on the steps, for a

glance at the view from this hilltop, to get another picture in his mind before attending to whatever business it was the general had for him.

Far below him, beyond the palms that framed the view, the deep blue sea stretched away to a heat-misted horizon. In the middle distance, a warship, tiny like a toy, was heading for the harbour. Close in, over the edge of the hill and abruptly diminished by the vertical distance, the stone arms of the new dockyard, untidy with cranes and scaffolding, were white upon the blue water. Native workmen swarmed over it like busy ants. He wondered how many spies were still among that horde. He had pulled out half a dozen of them already, for unadvertised and summary court martial—gallant little officers, for all their coolie rags, who had smiled inscrutably at the firing party. One could not help admiring them.

Restored to a professional frame of mind, he turned and plunged into the comparative darkness of the building, went along the corridor to the door inscribed "G.O.C." tapped and entered. The general, pipe in mouth, was seated at his big desk, signing busily the papers which Rolfe, erect by his side, was presenting to him. Rolfe looked up at his appearance, nodded amicably, a discreet smile on his big pleasant face—good chap, Rolfe, the antithesis of Fanshaw, with a cheery word for everybody, a man who worked hard and played hard, even went the pace a little, despite his weight the most brilliant polo forward in the Garrison—but the general, attending to one thing at a time as was his wont, continued to dash off one signature after another without a glance at him. Only when he had finished the last of the papers which Rolfe now gathered into a sheaf and handed over to a waiting orderly did he lift his head, acknowledge Bruce's prompt salute.

"Don't go, Rolfe," he said, as that officer went toward the door with the orderly. "I want you both. Sit down, Bruce."

The orderly closed the door behind him and there was a moment or two of silence as the general leaned back

in his chair and refilled his pipe. Bruce contemplated the strong-jawed face with the iron-gray moustache, whose eyes narrowed themselves in a pause of meditation in which he brought his thoughts to a focus while, deliberately, without hurry, he struck a match and surrounded himself with the smoke cloud of the first few preliminary puffs. It was a familiar enough face to him. In his three years of staff captain to General Sanderson's brigade in the old days in France, Bruce had learned to like as well as respect that grimly efficient personality which, though human enough off duty, would, when the occasion demanded, send men to certain death without a qualm yet never without a precisely achieved purpose that justified the sacrifice. Cunning as a fox he could be, too, as Fritz had more than once learned to his cost. The pause was at an end. The general's steel-gray eyes glanced comprehensively at his subordinates.

"Just see there's no one hanging round that door, Rolfe," he said, "and then sit down." His voice was serious.

Rolfe obeyed, went to the door, returned to take a chair at the side of the general's desk opposite to Bruce. They waited for his next words. They came with a quiet deliberation, between puffs at his pipe: "Can either of you imagine how any unauthorized person could have got at Plan C?"

The two men jumped in their chairs.

"Good Lord, sir?—you don't mean to say——?" began Rolfe.

Bruce said nothing. He just gasped in the shock. Plan C—he had seen it, of course; the general had explained it to Hathaway, Fanshaw, Rolfe, and him before locking it away—Plan C contained the diagrams of the submarine-mine barrages which would protect this most important base in war-time, together with the combination of cross fire from the batteries now being erected. If the potential enemy had got hold of those plans——! Good God!—— And only Hathaway, Fanshaw, Rolfe, and himself had been admitted to the secret of their existence.

Hathaway was dead, carried off in half-a-dozen hours by fever. But where was Fanshaw? Surely Fanshaw ought to be here also——

These thoughts, which went through him in a flash, were interrupted by the general's grim, quiet voice.

"That's precisely what I do mean to say. Someone has got at Plan C—and, of course, copied it."

"But—are you sure, sir?" said Rolfe, excited and incredulous.

For answer the general got up from his chair, went to the safe behind him, unlocked a heavy steel door with a key chained to his pocket, unlocked yet another door behind that, extracted from an inner drawer, locked by yet another key, a bulky envelope heavily sealed with red wax, brought it forward to them.

"This is a new envelope I sealed the other day," said the general. "Inside is the original." He tore it open, revealed another sealed envelope, ripped along one edge. "I cut it open myself when I found something was wrong. Now, gentlemen, our ingenious spy overlooked one little thing in his haste. Those seals are apparently quite all right. But when I put away that envelope, it had a fine hair tied round it, passing through the centre of the sealing wax. Is there any hair in that seal? There is not. Furthermore, the inner envelope was likewise tied round with a hair, and"—he extracted it—"you can see for yourselves that that hair has likewise disappeared. And for a final proof——" he pulled out several sheets of thin, blue paper, marked with curved masses of little black crosses and long straight lines that radiated from various points along a charted-out coastline, held it up to the light. "Do you see?" Close up to the edge in each corner was a minute pinhole where the sheet had been fastened out flat, presumably to be photographed. "Each sheet has those same little pinholes. I think that is sufficient evidence." He put back the plans in their envelopes, locked them again in the safe, turned to Bruce.

"Well, what have you to say to that?" he asked, with a grim smile.

"It knocks me over, sir," replied Bruce, "and it makes me feel somehow it's my fault. It's up to me to prevent that kind of thing."

"Precisely," agreed the general. "That's why I sent for you. You can't suggest any possible person?"

"No, sir. No one has any key to that safe but you." The general nodded.

"Quite. But someone has got at my keys, somehow—a whiff of a drug while I was asleep might have done it—these native thieves can get in anywhere—and taken an impression of them. There was that fellow you shot trying to break into your bedroom three or four nights ago, Rolfe, you remember?"

"The brute!" said Rolfe. "I just caught him slipping in through the window like a shadow."

"That's the kind of thing," said the general. "But observe! Only Plan C has been interfered with, and an ordinary native thief would certainly have helped himself to the considerable amount of cash which was much more in evidence than were the plans in the inner drawer. It is wildly improbable that any native could have distinguished one document from another, impossible that he should have picked on Plan C, copied it, and sealed it up again with the office seal. Whoever it was that got hold of my keys, he was only a subordinate agent, *employed by someone who knew that Plan C was in that safe.* And, apart from myself"—the general's probing eyes rested on each of them successively—"only four men were aware of that fact."

"It couldn't have been Hathaway," murmured Rolfe, screwing up his broad, honest face in cogitation of this problem.

"It could not," said the general. "Hathaway died six weeks ago. One of my little habits is to examine those envelopes every day. That envelope was interfered with just three weeks back."

"Three weeks!" exclaimed Bruce, in surprise.

"Three weeks," repeated the general. "I've been poaching on your preserves, Bruce—trying to do a little intelligence work in the meantime."

He had now seated himself again and relit his pipe, looking at them over the flame of the match. Bruce and Rolfe glanced at each other in uncomfortable embarrassment.

"Don't you think, sir," said Bruce, "that Fanshaw ought to be here too?"

"I did not invite Fanshaw," replied the general, ". . . *purposely.*"

"Good God!" The exclamation broke from Bruce in spontaneous horror. "Surely, sir, you don't think——?"

"Why—it might just as likely be either of us!" said Rolfe.

The general carefully put down his match in the ash tray.

"It might," he said, "and I confess that I gave some thought to that possibility. I went so far as to subsidize a burglar myself—for all three of you—a burglar that you didn't shoot, Rolfe." He smiled at him. "I was curious to know whether any of you had been doing any photography lately—and I took steps to find out within twenty-four hours of that envelope being tampered with. Your camera, Rolfe, I find, has a broken shutter and a thick layer of dust inside—you have evidently given up the hobby. Yours, Bruce, happened to be charged with a half-used spool. I developed those films and find they represent the Gymkhana which took place a couple of weeks before."

"That's where that spool went, then!" exclaimed Bruce, suddenly illuminated.

The general went on quietly: "Fanshaw's camera, on the other hand, a very excellent half-plate Zeiss, had no films in it. But it happened to have its focus adjustment left at three feet and closed up in the folds of the bellows was a certain amount of gray dust which, having once done a little photography myself, I recognized as magnesium ash."

"Good Lord!" said Bruce.

"I kept the camera and the ash as circumstantial evidence, if necessary," continued the general, "and, funnily

enough, Fanshaw thought fit to complain to me next day that someone had pinched his apparatus. Only he put the date of its disappearance as the day prior to that on which Plan C was tampered with. Since, however, my very excellent burglar found the camera in his room forty hours after Fanshaw alleged that he had missed it, I'm afraid the alibi won't wash."

"But surely, sir," objected Rolfe, "all this—even if it does look fishy—is very flimsy evidence!"

"Very," agreed the general, imperturbably. "But it happens to be reinforced. How much do you think Plan C is worth to—we won't specify the country?"

"They'd pay anything for it," said Bruce. "Twenty thousand pounds or more."

"Precisely. Or more. Now, Fanshaw was a poor man—I happen to know that he got into debt in India. I cannot discover that he has since come into any inheritance. Would his wife have had any money, Bruce?"

"Sir!"

"This is no time for fine feelings!" The old man crushed him with his sudden, formidable severity. "I know perfectly well that you were engaged to the lady. Did she have any money?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. I have been doing a good deal of private cipher work over the cables these last three weeks—and three days ago the sum of thirty-five thousand pounds was paid in London by bankers' draft from the Asiatic Bank to the London and North-Western Bank for the credit of a new account opened in favour of a certain John Smith by telegraphic instruction from Menangpore."

"Phew!" ejaculated Rolfe, mopping his brow. "Looks ugly!"

"But, sir," said Bruce, "how do you know that this John Smith is—— No, I can't say I like him, but I can't imagine Fanshaw doing it!"

For answer, the general unlocked the drawer at which he sat, produced a telegraph form.

"This is the original, handed in at the cable company's office four days back," he said.

"'London North-Western Bank London please open account with draft Asiatic Bank thirty-five thousand letter follows John Smith Menangpore.'

"This was handed in by a native who has not yet been traced. But note!—the message is typewritten and gummed on to the telegraph form—and it is written on a Yöst machine. There is only one Yöst machine in this garrison, and that happens to be in Fanshaw's office—the one he reserves for his own use. It is true, there are probably other Yösts in Menangpore, but no two machines, even of the same make, write precisely alike. I have personally copied this message again on Fanshaw's machine—here it is." He laid a typewritten slip of paper side by side with the cablegram before them; one looked like a carbon copy of the other. "You see—they are identical, the same weak *n* and *p*, the same worn *c*, the same *f* out of alignment."

"There is no doubt about it," said Bruce, handing them back after careful scrutiny, "but, sir—this is awful!"

"And the letter that follows," inquired Rolfe, "have you got that, sir?"

"That was stopped in the post last night," replied the general, taking another sheet of paper from his drawer. "Here it is. It doesn't tell us much. It merely confirms the cablegram, gives the specimen of the signature 'John Smith,' and orders the money to be held on deposit pending further instructions. It is typed on the same machine and addressed from the European Club."

"That doesn't mean much," said Bruce. "Everyone goes there. I was there myself yesterday."

"So was I," said Rolfe.

"So was Fanshaw," added the general. He leaned back in his chair, contemplated them grimly. "Well?"

"I don't know what to say, sir," said Bruce. "It is too terrible!"

Rolfe mopped his broad, honest face in evident distress.

"I suppose it means a court martial, sir?" he said.

The general smiled with the faintest twist of his lips.

"My dear Rolfe," he said, "you are sometimes an amazingly simple person. There is no doubt at all that our friend the possible enemy is already in possession of Plan C. Whatever happens, he mustn't be allowed to guess that *we know he knows it.* Plan C is actually already *ipso facto* obsolete. He must think it is still our real war plan and we in blissful ignorance of his stolen knowledge. A court martial would give him the hint—you can't keep secrecy over things like that. No. A court martial is out of the question."

"Then—nothing is to be done, sir?" queried Rolfe.

"Oh, yes," said the general, quietly. "We're certainly going to do something. We can't let people play games of this sort with impunity."

"What do you propose, then, sir?" asked Bruce.

The general kept them in suspense for a moment while he relit his pipe. Then he leaned forward, the match alight between his fingers.

"You and Rolfe are going to pay a little friendly call on Fanshaw this afternoon," he said, significantly. He help up the match before them, caught their eyes, blew out the flame. "Traitors sometimes commit suicide in a fit of remorse—*and leave a signed confession,*" he added, in grim elucidation.

Bruce jumped to his feet, found himself trembling violently.

"Sir—I can't do it!"

The general turned on him that gaze which he knew how to make suddenly terrible.

"What do you mean?" he asked, sternly.

Bruce felt himself like an audacious schoolboy under those insupportable eyes. But he nerved himself to confront them.

"Sir—I beg of you—choose someone else! It puts me in an impossible—a terrible position!"

The general's voice came at him like a clap of thunder.

"Major Bruce! Since when have you learned to disobey my orders?"

It was the same voice, the same inexorably hard face, aflame with eyes whose sudden blaze of authority annihilated opposition, with which—Bruce found it recalled to him by an odd trick of memory—at Devil's Wood he had ordered forward the remnant of his brigade to certain death over corpses already three deep. When General Sanderson commanded, men obeyed—without question. Bruce had obeyed then, forgetting the shrinking of his flesh in the storm of shells. He surrendered now, wretchedly, long habit of discipline asserting itself.

Wordlessly, eyes fixed on his, the general accepted his submission. He turned to Rolfe.

"Have you any objection to make, Major Rolfe?" he asked, harshly.

Rolfe stood twisting his handkerchief in his hands, his broad, honest face deathly white, perspiration pearling on his brow.

"No—no, sir," he stammered.

The general's face cleared to an expression that was more kindly. He turned to Bruce.

"I'm sorry to ask this of you, Bruce, but it can't be helped. In the first place, it's your job as Intelligence Officer. In the second, only you, Rolfe, and Fanshaw know anything of this business. We can't admit any more to it. Also, you understand, this is *unofficial*—an affair of honour, between officers and gentlemen. I send Major Fanshaw two of his own rank. I shall expect your report in half-an hour. And, remember, *a written and signed confession.*"

Bruce heard him as though he were in a dream. His mind held only one clearly definite thought: Nina! *Nina!* It hammered in him with every beat of the blood through his suddenly fevered brain. What would Nina think—Nina whom he had just promised—Nina whose happiness he was going brutally to annihilate? Nina! It made him feel sick. He could almost have wished that it were he

himself guilty of this unspeakably loathly crime rather than that it should be Nina's husband. Nina's husband! Nina's husband! God!—Nina's husband, whom she adored!

It was automatically, as in a dream, that he saluted the general and, with Rolfe, went out of the office; in an unreal dream that he found himself walking across the parade ground, in the blinding glare of the sun, toward Fanshaw's bungalow. Nina!—Nina's husband! He would rather have walked to execution than to the mission on which he was bound.

"Ruddy business, isn't it?" said Rolfe, thickly.

Bruce glanced at his comrade. The broad, normally cheery face was deathly white, beaded with damp. Good old Rolfe! He hated it, too. He was suddenly grateful for his companionship. Rolfe's thorough and well-known decency somehow sanctioned their errand. In his straightforward sense of duty, he had not jibbed at the general's order. It was true that Nina—Nina meant nothing to him, of course.

He failed to get a word out of his throat in answer, and they walked on in silence.

They were within a dozen yards of Fanshaw's bungalow when Rolfe turned to him.

"Oughtn't we to get our revolvers first?" he suggested.

"No." He could not trust his voice to more than curtness. "Unnecessary."

On the step of the veranda Rolfe clutched his arm, spoke again.

"You—you do the talking," he said. "It's your job. I'll back you up."

He nodded in mute acquiescence, summed all his will to steady the thumping of his heart, to find a voice to talk with.

They entered.

Bruce pushed aside a mat curtain, saw Fanshaw busy writing at his table. He glanced up at them with his lantern-jawed, tight-lipped, worried-looking face as they came within the threshold.

"Hallo, you fellows!" he said, rather ungraciously. "Paying visits? My wife's out—but you'll find the siphon over there." He jerked his pen toward the sideboard while his eyes went down again to the letter he was writing. "Help yourselves."

To Bruce's surprise, he found that he could speak.

"Fanshaw——"

Fanshaw looked up again irritably from the half-written word.

"Yes?" And then he saw the ghastliness of their faces. "Why—what's wrong?" His tone changed sharply to startled concern. "What in the world's the matter? You look perfectly awful, both of you."

Again Bruce found that he could speak.

"Fanshaw," he said, "we've come to talk to you—Rolfe and I. D'you mind if we sit down?" He felt that he must sit or fall.

Fanshaw stared at them.

"You'll find chairs there," he said, shortly. "What is it?"

They seated themselves, confronting him over his writing table. Bruce glanced up to the wall behind Fanshaw where a revolver holster was hanging from a peg.

"D'you mind—" he asked, awkwardly, "d'you mind letting me have your revolver, Fanshaw?"

Fanshaw stared at them, puzzled, and then rose, took the revolver holster from the wall, threw it upon the table rather peevishly. Bruce picked it up.

"Now, then, what's the trouble?" queried Fanshaw as he sat down again. "What do you want my revolver for? I can see by your faces that something is wrong."

Bruce dandled the heavy holster.

"Fanshaw," he said, "we—Rolfe and I—have come on a pretty rotten job. Plan C has been got at and copied."

Fanshaw frowned at him in incredulity. *"Plan C?"* he echoed. "Good God!"

"Pretty loathsome, isn't it?" said Bruce, between his teeth. He was beginning to hate that thin-faced traitor in front of him—a quite unsuspected fount of deep-

drawn instinctive hatred surged up in him—he would dare to try and bluff them, would he? If only he weren't Nina's husband! "Pretty loathsome, Fanshaw," he repeated with grim directness.

Fanshaw put up an amazingly good show of bewilderment—almost impressive, had it not been for the general's coldly logical, step-by-step demonstration.

"Good God! But the general slept with the keys fastened round his neck—he told me so himself!"

Bruce looked him in the eyes, tried to look into the soul of him.

"We don't want to go into that," he said. "We know all about it. The general has sent us, Rolfe and me, to settle the matter without a public scandal."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Fanshaw looked from one to the other of them, his face a study in lack of comprehension.

"You know—*"perfectly well!"* said Bruce. "The game's up, Fanshaw. There's no use bluffing. You're caught out. We've got the evidence."

Fanshaw stared at them.

"You've—got—the—evidence?" he said, slowly, in a tone that seemed to try to make it real to himself. "What evidence?"

"More than enough for a court martial to shoot you half-a-dozen times over," replied Bruce, succinctly. "Fanshaw, this is a rotten business. It makes me sick to have to do it. But for the honour of the army—for the sake of your own family—we don't want a scandal. We give you an easy way out. We want a written and signed confession—I give you my word that no one shall see it but the general—no one shall know anything about it—and then"—he drew the revolver from the holster, laid it upon the table, pushed it toward Fanshaw—"we'll leave you with this. You can pretend to have been cleaning it."

Fanshaw stared at the revolver, shrank back from it, looked up again at the two of them, a sudden horror in his eyes.

"You mean——?" he began.

Bruce pushed the weapon a little nearer to him.

"Precisely what I say, Fanshaw," he said, his words distinct despite the dryness of his mouth. "And no one —not even Nina—shall ever guess." He had used her Christian name unconsciously. "The episode will be buried —with you."

Fanshaw knocked away the revolver, jumped to his feet.

"You must be mad—both of you!" he cried. "Utterly mad!—I'm going to see the general at once!" He took a step toward the door.

Bruce placed himself in front of him.

"I'm sorry, Fanshaw. But it can't be allowed. The general sent us to you. He gave us half an hour in which to bring back your written confession." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Ten minutes of it have gone. You've made a bad break, Fanshaw—but own up, and play out the only decent game open to you. You ought to be grateful for the chance." With a strong arm he thrust him back toward the table.

Fanshaw stood looking at them, trembling suddenly, his face as white as theirs.

"Either you are both mad!" he cried, "or this is an infernal conspiracy to murder me!" He looked into Bruce's eyes with an insulting suspicion. "I can imagine that *one* of you has a motive," he said, deliberately, "though I should not have thought it of you."

Bruce winced as though he had been slashed across the face.

"Leave that out, Fanshaw," he said. "For just that reason I'd rather be dead than here. I'm obeying orders —don't make it harder for me. Will you write out that confession?"

"Of course not! I know nothing about it. If any one has any charges to bring against me, let them be brought forward in a proper manner—and I'll deal with them." He wrapped himself in his dignity as an officer, spoke with curt contempt.

Rolfe intervened for the first time in this colloquy.

"Fanshaw," he said, thickly. "You know that means a court martial—and I wouldn't give tuppence for your chance."

Fanshaw swung round on him.

"Look here, I've had enough of this! Clear out—both of you! And I'll trouble you, both of you, to meet me in front of the general!"

Rolfe shrugged his big shoulders, looked at Bruce.

"Well," he said, "I suppose if Fanshaw *insists* on a court martial, we're helpless. We can't compel him to write a confession. The only thing is to report it. We've done our best—and, for my part, Fanshaw, I'm glad of an excuse to be out of a very unpleasant business. Come along, Bruce!"

He took a step toward the door, was checked by Bruce's restraining arm.

"No," said Bruce, his teeth clenched. "We're going to stay here until we've done our job—and there's not going to be any public scandal in this business. Fanshaw!"—he looked him in the eyes—"for the sake of all that was ever sacred to you in the world—for the sake of your old school—the army—*for your wife's sake!*—play the man and own up decently. You haven't the ghost of a chance before a court martial, and, though they might not shoot you, the disgrace would be worse than death—for you—and"—his voice choked—"for Nina."

Fanshaw's look at him was an insult.

"Major Bruce," he said, "I shall be obliged if you will refer to my wife as Mrs. Fanshaw."

The three men jumped at a bright, girlish voice from the other side of the mat curtain. "Dick darling!—I'm back!—I've escaped!" There was a happy little laugh as the mat curtain was pulled back and Nina stood on the threshold. Her fresh young face lit up in pleasant surprise as she saw Bruce. "Why, Frank!—how nice of you to come so soon!" she exclaimed, coming toward him and stretching out her hand.

Bruce had one glance at her, and something seemed to smite him sharply, viciously, inside him. He turned

away his head, omitted to notice her proffered hand. He got his voice somehow.

"Fanshaw," he said, "will you please ask your wife to leave us? This—this is an official matter."

She came nearer, perceived Rolfe, who had turned to stare at a print upon the wall, and now nodded awkwardly to her. Her eyes went round the three men.

"Why—what is wrong?" she cried. "What has happened?—You look ghastly, all of you!"

There was a silence.

"Frank! What is the matter? What have you and Major Rolfe come about?" He did not reply, avoided her eyes. "Dick!" She clutched his arm. "Tell me!"

Fanshaw shrugged his shoulders, smiled unpleasantly at Bruce.

"My dear," he replied, "apparently some important secret plans have been stolen, and it seems that in some way or other it has been made to look as though I had done it. Consequently, Major Bruce and Major Rolfe have come here with the amiable proposal that I write out a confession and then commit suicide." Bruce set his teeth, stifling a groan. *The cad!* Not to keep it from Nina! Fanshaw went on: "Alternatively, I shall be condemned by a court martial."

She swung round upon Bruce in a flame of indignation. *"Oh!"* she cried. "And *you* can believe this? *You* could come here to—to——" She made a gesture of horror. *"You* of all people——!"

He met her eyes—and wished that he were dead.

"I couldn't help myself," he managed to say. "I tried —not to have to do it. It was an order—from the general—to both of us."

"But you believed it!" You believed this of Dick!—You—you who promised me to be his friend—you did not tell the general that it was utterly impossible—you did not stand up for him—you—*you believed it!"* Her contemptuous indignation scorched him.

"I'd have given all I know not to—not to have had to believe it," he said, desperately, "but—but——"

"But what?"

"If I must—the evidence is too convincing!" He cursed himself for saying so much, even as the words were uttered.

"And what is this evidence?"

Bruce turned from her to Fanshaw.

"For God's sake, Fanshaw—I can't stand any more of this—either ask you wife to withdraw—or"—he gestured abandonment to disaster—"we must let matters take their official course."

Fanshaw was the least perturbed person in the room.

"I should like to hear your precious evidence myself," he said, with an unpleasant curtness of tone. "Tell her!"

Bruce looked again at the woman whose happiness was the one thing in the world that mattered to him.

"I insist!" she said. "And I have a right to insist!"

He surrendered to the look of proud authority in her pale face. "I'd infinitely rather not," he said, "but since so much has been said already——" He flashed a glance of scorn at Fanshaw. His face haggard with the long-continued strain, but with a succinct clarity, he told her of the tampering with the secret plan, known to Fanshaw, Rolfe, and himself alone; of the finding of Fanshaw's camera, with the focus set to three feet and flashlight ash still upon the bellows, within twenty-four hours after the plan had been copied and forty hours after Fanshaw had said he had lost it.

"But someone might have stolen Dick's camera, used it and put it back!" she exclaimed.

"They might," he agreed, "but that's not all." He went on to tell her of the banker's draft for thirty-five thousand pounds paid by the Asiatic Bank to the credit of a new account opened in an assumed name by cable from Menangpore and confirmed by letter. "And," he concluded, through his set teeth, "both cablegram and letter were typed on your husband's Yöst machine which he uses personally."

"Good God!" ejaculated Fanshaw, mopping his face with his handkerchief.

She had listened intently. "And is that all your evidence?" she asked.

"It's damnably convincing, Mrs. Fanshaw—though I hate to say it. The man who got at that plan must have been either your husband, Rolfe, or myself. You can't imagine us coming on a job like this if either of us did it. And all the evidence piles up against——" He broke off abruptly, with a gesture toward Fanshaw. "The whole thing's too ghastly," he finished.

Fanshaw was about to say something when his wife checked him. Her brow was wrinkled with a sudden thought.

"Wait a moment," she said. "What was the name of the bank in London and what name was on the cablegram?"

"The cable was sent by someone signing himself John Smith to the London and North-Western Bank."

"*John Smith?*" She gave a little cry of triumph. "And who handed in that cablegram?"

"A native who has not yet been traced."

"Then perhaps I can throw some light on it. Four days ago, after dark, when I was sitting on the veranda, a native came wandering up the road and asked me, in broken English, if I had seen a certain officer. I could not understand him very well at first, and as he had a piece of paper in his hand I made him show it to me, thinking that it would give the name. That piece of paper was the receipt from the cable company for a cablegram sent to the London and North-Western Bank by John Smith. I didn't know the name, and I asked him if he was sure it was 'Smith' he wanted. He said: 'No —no—Major Sahib Roff—*Major Sahib Roff!*' And I sent him along to Major Rolfe's bungalow!"

"That's a lie!" Rolfe burst out, furiously, "A stupid lie!"

"Steady, Rolfe!" said Bruce. "You forget you are speaking to a lady."

"She'd tell any yarn, of course, to save her husband—and it is a lie!" Rolfe reiterated.

"That same evening," she went on, coldly ignoring the interruption, "we heard that Major Rolfe had shot a native who was trying to burgle his house."

"That's true enough," exclaimed Rolfe. "I just caught the brute as he was clambering through the window. But the other is sheer imagination. Look here, Bruce, I'm not going to stay here while Mrs. Fanshaw invents red herrings to draw across the trail. She can tell that story to the court martial. I'm going back to the general to report that Fanshaw refuses to sign a confession. Come along!" He took a step toward the door.

"No!" cried Mrs. Fanshaw. She stepped in front of him with a quick movement, blocking the doorway. "You will please wait a little, Major Rolfe!" she said, and then turned to Bruce. "Frank! Supposing—I only ask you to suppose—that Major Rolfe was the one of you three who sent that cablegram, and that he still has the receipt in his pocket—is it safe to let him go out of here, and perhaps destroy it? It might be the one piece of evidence that could save Dick."

"Nonsense!" said Rolfe, angrily. "It is a monstrous suggestion! Please let me pass, Mrs. Fanshaw!"

She ignored him, looked at Bruce.

"Frank! I want you to search Major Rolfe before he leaves this room."

Fanshaw interposed.

"My dear, whatever you think—one can't do things like that. You can't expect Bruce to insult a brother officer on your mere supposition. But"—he glanced sharply at Rolfe—"in view of what you have said, we will all accompany him to the general."

She turned to her husband.

"Dick," she said, "you are under suspicion, and anything you say or do may harm you. Leave this to me." She looked again at Bruce. "Frank! Please do as I say!"

Bruce hesitated, glanced at Rolfe who was red with indignation, his hands working irritably, as he stood unable to pass Mrs. Fanshaw without sheer violence to her.

It was impossible—fantastic! No man could have come on such an errand if he were himself guilty. He despised himself for even momentarily admitting the suspicion.

"But, Mrs. Fanshaw, what you ask of me is outrageous. Rolfe and I have been friends for years. It is unthinkable that he should have done it. You must have been mistaken about that native."

"I am not mistaken," she replied, doggedly. "Frank, things have been made to look black for Dick. He needs a pal—badly. To-day you gave me your word. Are you going to break it?" Her eyes challenged all he had ever felt for her.

He took a long breath, looked at Rolfe—cheery, thoroughly decent Rolfe, who now stood outraged by this diabolical supposition. All the long years of their intimacy rose up in protest. Insult him for that man he had no doubt was guilty, that man he had to keep himself from hating—Nina's husband? Nina's husband! Yes —*just because of that!* There was just one faint, improbable chance. He had to have it. He turned to Fanshaw.

"Fanshaw, before I insult Rolfe, I ask you—before God—whether you sold that plan?"

"Before God," replied Fanshaw, with sober emphasis, "I did not."

Bruce twisted himself round to Rolfe.

"Rolfe," he said, "I hate to even seem to suspect you of such a horrible thing, but I must ask you to let me go through your pockets."

"Certainly not!" said Rolfe, indignantly. "I have just as much right to search you! Mrs. Fanshaw can make her absurd accusation before the court martial—and the court will decide whether Major Fanshaw is guilty or not. But I'm certainly not going to submit to the indignity of letting you go through my private papers without any authorization whatever!" His broad face was livid with anger.

Bruce placed himself in front of Mrs. Fanshaw, blocking the doorway. For the first time, a real suspicion shot up in him.

"Rolfe," he said, steadily, "I am certainly going to search you—even if I knock you down for it."

"You'd better try!" replied Rolfe, in furious scorn. "I'm going straight to the general—and I advise you to stand away from that door!"

Bruce smiled. The next moment Rolfe had rushed at him, and, rushing, met a straight left from the shoulder. He went with a crash to the floor.

Before he could stir, Bruce was on top of him, one hand on his throat, the other going through the pockets of his tunic. He extracted a letter wallet, held it out to Mrs. Fanshaw. She took it, went to the window, examined it, uttered a sharp little cry.

"Here it is!"

Bruce got to his feet, reached for the revolver on the table, held Rolfe covered.

"What is it?" he asked. "Here, Fanshaw, take the gun and see he doesn't rush."

He went to the window, took the two pieces of paper Mrs. Fanshaw handed to him. One was the receipt from the cable company; the other was covered with evidently practice signatures of "John Smith." He turned to Rolfe, who had also scrambled to his feet and stood sullenly scared and silent under the menace of Fanshaw's weapon.

"Have you got anything to say?"

An ugly word was the only answer.

Bruce addressed himself to Mrs. Fanshaw.

"Mrs. Fanshaw," he said, with a quietly grim politeness, "will you now please leave us. You have played your part. Dick and I will do the rest."

She went straight out of the room. The three men, left alone, stood looking at one another in a pause of silence. It was Bruce who broke it.

"Rolfe," he said, curtly, "I once had the honour of serving under your father. He was a gallant gentleman. For his sake, I give you the chance the general sent us to give Fanshaw." He pointed to the table. "Sit down—and write! And afterward Fanshaw and I will see you as far as your bungalow."

Rolfe stood staring at him, a little foam upon the lips of his broad white face. For a moment he looked into Bruce's eyes, measured the inexorability of that decision, and then, slowly, unsteadily, he walked toward the writing table.

. . . . . .

The general was still at his desk, leaning back in his chair, blowing meditative smoke rings toward the ceiling, when Bruce entered, saluted.

"And Rolfe?" he asked, as his eyes came down to Bruce's solitary figure.

Bruce stepped forward, handed him a written sheet of notepaper, pointed shakily to the signature at the bottom.

"Here, sir," he said, in a voice that lacked steadiness for all his effort at self-command.

The general contemplated it, shifted his pipe from one side of his mouth to the other, bit upon the stem.

"H'm!" he said. "And afterwards?" He looked up at him.

Bruce blew out an imaginary match.

The general nodded. Methodically, he folded up the paper, put it in an envelope, sealed it, and locked it up in his drawer. Then he smiled grimly.

"A bad hat," he said. "I was pretty sure he was the man, but everything pointed to Fanshaw. Rolfe's frontal defense was as good as impregnable. And we learnt in France, I think, not to make frontal attacks on impregnable defenses. There's nearly always a way round."

Bruce stared at him. "Then you guessed, sir?"

The general shrugged his shoulders. "It was one of the two. I knew Fanshaw wouldn't sign if he were innocent, and I sent you to see fair play. The art of war, my dear Bruce, is the art of producing sudden crises and taking measures to profit by them. You can never foresee exactly how you'll do it, but you nearly always get what you want—if you put the right man on the job. In the very special circumstances"—he smiled significantly—"I knew you were the right man."

F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

THE FOURTH DEGREE

SEBRIGHT of Scotland Yard sat in our office. He had dropped in, as he often did, unofficially, for a friendly yarn.

"Unpleasant business round at the Foreign Office this morning, Q. Q.," he remarked, as he helped himself to one of the excellent cigarettes which the Chief, though a rigid nonsmoker himself, kept hospitably for his visitors. "I suppose you've heard?"

Q. Q. raised his eyebrows.

"No," he said. "What's the trouble?"

"Arbuthnot shot himself."

"Arbuthnot! Shot himself?" The Chief's voice was at once startled and incredulous.

"Yep." Sebright nodded casually, and then savored again the aroma of the cigarette between his fingers. "First-rate brand, these of yours, Quayne. Where do you get 'em?"

Mr. Quayne ignored this cold-bloodedly irrelevant question. He leaned forward across his desk, in a curious sudden alertness of expression that in any other man I should have called excitement. But Q. Q. was never excited. Merely that ice-cold brain of his, at the appropriate stimulus, could function with lightning rapidity, leap from analysis to synthesis, from clue to hypothesis, from a seeming normality to the perception of a hidden crime, with a swift accuracy that left me, despite his painstaking training, always bewildered. In this case, he had some reason for interest beyond the ordinary. Old Mr. Arbuthnot of the Foreign Office had sat in this room only yesterday.

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"My dear Sebright," he said, in a tone that made that gentleman look up, "are you quite sure?"

Sebright nodded again, this time more emphatically.

"Sure," he replied, still professionally nonchalant. "Saw him myself."

"I mean—are you sure he shot himself?"

Sebright stared at him.

"No doubt about it. One of his clerks was passing along the corridor—heard a detonation in his room—opened the door and rushed in—and there was Arbuthnot collapsed in his chair at his desk—bullet-wound through the side of his head—his own revolver lying on the floor, just as it had fallen from his hand. The clerk gave the alarm at once, of course. I was sent for—found nothing had been touched—clear case of suicide. The coroner's inquest may throw some light on the motive—no one at the F. O. could suggest any." He gave these details with a curt definiteness, finally disposing of a question that held no further interest for him.

The Chief pondered a moment.

"On which side of the head was the death-wound, Sebright?"

"The right-hand side, of course."

"You're certain of that?"

"Quite. You know his room—when you come in from the corridor, his desk is just to the left of you, and he sits with his back to the door, facing the window. The wound was on the side of the head visible as you come in—I remember seeing it at once, and accidentally kicking with my foot the revolver lying on the floor. It was the normal right-hand side, right enough."

"H'm!" Q. Q. grunted. "But not normal for Arbuthnot. He happened to be left-handed. It didn't occur to you to make inquiries on that point, I suppose?"

"Of course it didn't. People aren't usually left-handed." Sebright stared, startled, at Mr. Quayne as he made the admission. "Why, you are not suggesting—"

"Murder." Q. Q. uttered the word with a grimly succinct finality.

"But why—" Sebright still stared at him out of a sudden chaos of previously settled convictions. "What makes you jump to this conclusion? Who would want to murder poor old Arbuthnot?"

"My dear Sebright,"—Q. Q.'s tight lips twisted in a faint smile,—"only yesterday Arbuthnot sat in that chair. He had come to see me—privately, unofficially—and he was very much troubled. He was convinced that there was a leakage of secret information from his department. Arbuthnot was a queer old fellow, as you know. His one hobby, I believe, was the solution of acrostics and ciphers. He used to read solemnly through the agony-column of the *Times* every evening, while his wife sat sewing opposite him, and puzzle out the code-messages of all the illicit lovers who communicate through that medium. The evening before he came to me, he had had a shock. One of the messages he decoded conveyed to some one unknown a piece of highly secret information that could only have emanated from his department. The poor old boy was in a terrible state—he did not want to go to his chief with the news until he could at the same time indicate the culprit—he was of course, like most civil servants in a senior position, extremely sensitive to the honor of his department; it was heartbreaking to him to think it should be indiscriminately disgraced. He came to me for advice. He was to have called again today."

"Phew!" exclaimed Sebright, thoroughly perturbed. "This makes everything look different. I wish to heaven he had come to see me about it at once! I hate these stories at secondhand—I'd give a lot to hear him tell me all about it himself!"

Q. Q. smiled quietly, rose from his chair.

"He shall tell you, my dear Sebright. You shall hear, in his own voice, everything he told me—and we'll see what you make of it." He went across to a cabinet on the farther wall, opened a drawer, returned with a long black cylinder. "When a case is brought to me, I not infrequently allow my informant, unknown to himself, to tell it to the dictaphone at the same time. I have found,

more than once, a help to elucidation in listening to it repeated, precisely as it was originally told, when I am sitting here undistracted by his personal presence. One can have the vital points reiterated over and over again *ad libitum.*"

He sat down to his comfortably large desk, slipped the cylinder into a concealed slot, pressed a button which uncovered a long aperture in the side of the desk toward the room, pressed another button. There was a faint whir of a mechanism started into activity, and then:

"One of my clerks must somehow have taken an impression of my key—"

It was the voice—almost startlingly recognizable to me as I sat quietly at my own desk at the other side of the room—of Mr. Arbuthnot. It evoked immediately for me the image of that large-built man with a little pointed gray beard who had, only yesterday, sat in the chair where Sebright was now sitting. Sebright jumped, involuntarily.

"My God, Q. Q.," he said, "it's uncanny to hear him like that! Just as if he were still here!"

Q. Q. smiled quietly as he bent down to the cylinder.

"The needle wasn't quite at the commencement," he said. "We'll let him tell his story again from the beginning." He made the necessary adjustment.

It was indeed uncanny—even to me, accustomed to hear such repetitions from the dictaphone (Q. Q. did not use the usual ear-pieces; he had installed a loud-speaker to which he could listen while he paced up and down the room)—to listen to that dead man's voice repeated with lifelike accuracy in that still room. It was a deep, solemn, booming voice, a voice that would have made a bishop of its owner had he been a parson, a voice that came vibrant with natural authority. And that voice told the story all over again, precisely as I had heard it the day before from the man's living presence, just as Q. Q. had summarized it to Sebright. The record concluded on the energetically uttered phrase: *"He shall confess, Mr. Quayne—I am determined on it!"*

"Well, Sebright," remarked Q. Q., as he stopped the mechanism, "what do you make of it? You have heard Arbuthnot's own voice."

"I don't want to hear it again," said Sebright with a shudder. "Shut the thing off. It gives me the creeps. Remember, I saw that man lying dead this morning."

"Practice that imagination of yours, Sebright," commented the Chief with his grim smile. "It's essential in this detective business. . . . Well, what are you going to do on this information? Anything?"

Sebright was thoughtful for a moment, evidently reluctant to open up again a matter on which he had publicly pronounced his official dictum.

"Of course," he said, "Arbuthnot might still have committed suicide—in the distress, the sense of disgrace to his department, caused by his discovery."

"Do left-handed men usually shoot themselves on the right-hand side of the head, Sebright?" asked Q. Q. quietly. "I knew Arbuthnot very well indeed. I am prepared to ask that question at the coroner's inquest."

"That means a public scandal, Quayne—a lot of unwelcome limelight on the F. O."

"I dislike private scandals even more," said the Chief. "I regarded Arbuthnot as an old personal friend—and his murderer is certainly going to be found. Remand that inquest, Sebright—and if we present the murderer simultaneously with the coroner's verdict, there will be no scandal. There will be only praise for Scotland Yard."

"But how are we going to find him?" challenged Sebright, in exasperation. "There's not the slightest clue. The revolver is admittedly Arbuthnot's own—one he kept in his desk. The clerk who burst into the room immediately after the detonation found no one but the dead man."

"Who was that clerk?"

"Oglethorpe—the next senior to Arbuthnot. He was passing along the corridor—or so he says." Sebright stopped. "Of course, he might have—"

"What?"

Sebright was suddenly illumined with a theory. "Shot Arbuthnot with Arbuthnot's own revolver and dashed out into the corridor. There's no evidence, one way or the other. The corridor was empty. People in the vicinity heard the detonation, but before they could investigate it, Oglethorpe ran into the room where the other clerks were sitting and told his story."

"H'm!" Q. Q. stroked his jutting chin. "I know Oglethorpe. . . . How many clerks are there in Arbuthnot's personal department?"

"Six—including Oglethorpe."

"Do you happen to know if the other five were in the room when Oglethorpe entered it?"

"No. There were only three—it came out while I was questioning as to who had seen Arbuthnot that morning."

"Who were absent?"

"Johnson—he was away looking for a file in the Registry."

Q. Q. nodded.

"And the other man?"

"D'Arcy Vaughan—the next in seniority to Oglethorpe. He was out at lunch."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite. He went to lunch at twelve o'clock as usual. The tragedy occurred at ten minutes past. I saw him when he returned—gave him the first news of it. . . . No, Q. Q.!" Sebright thumped his fist on his knee in emphasis. "If Arbuthnot was murdered—it could only have been done by Oglethorpe!"

"Why?" Q. Q. lifted his gray eyebrows.

"On his own showing, he dashed into that room immediately *after* the detonation. If the murderer were some one else, he must still have been there! He could not possibly have got away."

"H'm!" Q. Q. grunted. "I know Arbuthnot's room pretty well. I seem to remember that it has a large cupboard where Arbuthnot used to hang his overcoat. Allow yourself to consider another hypothesis. The murderer, hearing Oglethorpe come to the door, might have slipped

into that cupboard and dodged out again immediately Oglethorpe had gone to give the alarm."

"Might!" echoed Sebright contemptuously. "All sorts of things *might* happen. I consider possibilities only after I've dealt with certainties. What is certain is that one of Arbuthnot's confidential clerks was passing out information, that Arbuthnot knew of it and was trying to discover the source of leakage,—*did* discover it, perhaps,—that Oglethorpe had, next to Arbuthnot himself, the easiest access to secret information, that if Arbuthnot was left-handed he did not shoot himself, and that Oglethorpe was admittedly there in the room so soon after the murder that no murderer could have escaped from it—unless it was Oglethorpe himself, with his plausible story of hearing the shot while passing the door and then discovering the suicide." Sebright rose briskly to his feet. "I'm going to check up Mr. Oglethorpe a little, Q. Q.," he concluded. "And unless my intuition is much at fault, Mr. Oglethorpe is going to sleep in a police-cell tonight."

Q. Q. smiled at him.

"That intuition of yours is positively uncanny, Sebright," he said. "You may be quite right, of course. It may just as well be Oglethorpe as another. That it was one of Arbuthnot's own clerks who murdered him, I feel certain. . . . Do you mind my doing a little investigation of my own? It won't conflict with yours, and I have a personal interest in the matter."

"You can do what you like—so long as you don't scare away the game," replied Sebright magnanimously. He glanced at his watch. "I'm going to get busy—and I'll let you know directly I slip my handcuffs on the man."

Q. Q. smiled again.

"I'll do the same by you, Sebright," he said. "Well, the best of luck to you!"

The moment the door had closed behind Sebright's back, the Chief took up the telephone and asked for a number.

"Hello! . . . Yes. . . . Put me through to Mr. Oglethorpe, please. . . . Is that Mr. Oglethorpe speaking? . . . Good. This is Quentin Quayne—of the Q. Q. Agency.

Could you manage to snatch a few minutes, Mr. Oglethorpe, and come round and see me here—Piccadilly Circus—as soon as possible? I should be immensely obliged to you. . . . Yes, it *is* urgent—very urgent, in fact. . . . Thank you—that's excellent."

The Chief put down the telephone, looked across to me.

"Coming at once. Oglethorpe knows me well enough to know that when I say 'urgent,' it means urgent. Now I hope we shall learn something."

Perhaps ten quiet minutes elapsed—ten minutes in which Q. Q. after leaning back thoughtfully in his chair for a moment or two, bent forward to his desk and wrote rapidly a long single column of words on a sheet of paper—and then Mr. Oglethorpe was announced.

He came into the room, a thin, worried-looking man of about forty-five years of age, clean-shaven, a little bald, conventionally the higher grade civil servant in his morning-coat, dark trousers, and the silk hat courteously doffed as he entered, conventionally the civil servant, too, in his precise, somewhat pedantic manner. The Chief shook hands with him like an old acquaintance, indicated the chair close to his desk. Mr. Oglethorpe seated himself.

"You want to see me about this terrible business in the office, I suppose, Mr. Quayne?" he said.

"Exactly," Q. Q. smiled at him.

"I have worked with Arbuthnot for twenty years—and I should never have dreamed that he was the man to commit suicide!" exclaimed Mr. Oglethorpe, in a tone of genuine horror at the memory.

Q. Q. continued to smile as he looked straight at his visitor, but there was no humor in that smile.

"Perhaps he did not commit suicide, Mr. Oglethorpe," he said quietly.

Mr. Oglethorpe jumped in his chair.

"What? Did not commit suicide? What on earth do you mean, Mr. Quayne? It must have been suicide—why, I was in the room a fraction of a minute after his revolver went off—I heard it as I passed along the corridor. It couldn't—how could it?—have been anything else than

suicide, incredible though it seems!" Mr. Oglethorpe was a picture of puzzled bewilderment—the implication in Q. Q.'s words was plain enough.

"Well, Mr. Oglethorpe," the Chief said in his smoothest tones, "there *is* a little doubt about it—for reasons which I will not go into. Will you just tell me all you know of the tragedy?"

Mr. Oglethorpe told his story, quite clearly and definitely, just as we had heard it already from Sebright. He was coming along the corridor from another department at ten past twelve when he heard the shot. He had rushed into the room. Arbuthnot was there alone, crumpled in his chair, a wound in the right side of his head. Horrified, he had dashed off to give the alarm. Yes—of course, he knew the cupboard in Arbuthnot's room—he could not say whether the door of it was open or shut—he hadn't given a thought to it. He had seen no one in the corridor, before or after the tragedy.

Q. Q. nodded gravely as he finished.

"Well, Mr. Oglethorpe, there is a possibility—I don't want to enlarge upon it—that Arbuthnot was murdered by one of the clerks in his own department."

"Impossible!" Mr. Oglethorpe was emphatic, all his instincts outraged. "It is a monstrously absurd suggestion, Mr. Quayne, one that—as the temporary acting head of the department and in view of the plain facts—I cannot but resent!"

"Nevertheless, Mr. Oglethorpe, it is a suggestion that has been made—and one that I am bound to probe. You would of course do all you could to assist in finding poor Arbuthnot's murderer—assuming that he *was* murdered?"

"Of course I should—though, I repeat, I can't for a moment believe it. What do you require of me?"

"I want to submit the six confidential clerks in your department to a little psychological test. It is one which—if I can trust the experience of the Viennese police, and sundry little efforts of my own—can scarcely fail in such circumstances. You have heard of the word-association method?"

"Something to do with psycho-analysis, isn't it? Sheer quackery, all of it, in my opinion." Mr. Oglethorpe let it be seen that he was old-fashioned and proud of it.

"Precisely," Q. Q. concurred, with a smile. "It is a method much used by psycho-analysts. I put a word to you. You answer as quickly as possible with the first word that rises in your mind in association. I measure the time-interval, in each case, between my question and your answer. In my list of words are one or two which have a direct bearing upon the case. When those words are put to the concealed criminal, he instantly recognizes their danger and instinctively—no matter what his command of himself—hesitates for a safe word to give in answer. It is quite automatic on his part. And accordingly, to those keywords his time-interval of association will show as appreciably longer than his average. . . . Now, I want you to have the goodness to send your clerks across to me, one by one, this afternoon, Mr. Oglethorpe—and since I want to get as wide a basis as possible for my averages, I should be very glad if you would commence with yourself now."

"I haven't the slightest faith in any of this psycho-analytic charlatanry," said Mr. Oglethorpe, with a superior note of condescending disdain in his voice, "but if you think it will help you, go ahead by all means. Fire away—I'm ready."

Q. Q. drew his sheet of paper in front of him, sat with pencil-point poised.

"Bread!" he said, and his pencil-point began to dot across the paper.

"Butter!" answered Mr. Oglethorpe promptly. Q. Q. stopped dotting at his first syllable, scribbled the word rapidly.

"Sea!"—dot-dot.

"Ship!"

"Horse!"—dot-dot.

"Cart!"

"House!"—dot-dot-dot.

"Room!"

"Desk!"—dot-dot-dot-dot.
"Chair!"
"Table!"—dot-dot-dot.
"Cloth!"
"Cupboard!"—dot-dot-dot.
"Bone!" Mr. Oglethorpe gave the answer, an obvious nursery-rhyme memory, almost desperately. The strain of keeping his brain alert he evidently found more difficult than he had anticipated. Q. Q. scribbled down each answer as it was given.
"Carpet!"—dot-dot.
"Floor!"

And so on through a list of about fifty words where, at intervals, I remarked only *code, revolver* and *murder* as specially significant.

When he had got to the end, Q. Q. looked up with his quiet smile.

"Thank you, Mr. Oglethorpe," he said. It was impossible to deduce whether or not he had detected any grounds for suspicion in that rapid quasi-schoolchild examination. "I am much obliged by your complaisance. And now will you carry it to the length of sending along your clerks, one by one, in order, let us say, of their seniority?"

Mr. Oglethorpe rose from his chair.

"Very well, Mr. Quayne. However unfounded I may and do consider your suspicions to be, it is my duty to help you probe them. But I'm quite sure you'll find in the end that poor Arbuthnot committed suicide."

"Perhaps, Mr. Oglethorpe." Q. Q. smiled at him. "But I should all the same like to try my little test on your other clerks."

Mr. Oglethorpe departed. Q. Q. did not address a word to me in the interval while we waited for the appearance of the next clerk from Arbuthnot's office. I busied myself on the routine task before me. Q. Q. leaned back in his chair, finger-tips together, frowning in a concentration of thought beyond my guesses.

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan was announced. He was a younger

man than Mr. Oglethorpe, struck a more modern note of smartly tailored, keen-edged efficiency. The little dark mustache on his good-looking face was neatly trimmed; his monocle gave him a touch of aristocratic differentiation from the usual office-worn type; his manner had the self-confident ease produced by the best of public-schools and a university. He smiled affably—with, however, a Foreign Office consciousness of personal dignity—as he approached the Chief.

"Oglethorpe tells me you want to see me about poor Arbuthnot's death, Mr. Quayne." He sank easily and comfortably into the chair Q. Q. indicated to him. "Anything I can do, of course—" He made a gesture of perfect readiness to oblige. "But I'm afraid that's not much."

Q. Q.'s quiet eyes were summing him up.

"So I understand. You were at lunch, I believe, when the tragedy occurred?"

"Yes. I knew nothing about it until I returned and the Scotland Yard fellow told me. It was a shock to me, of course, as it was to everyone else. Poor old fellow! One would never have suspected a suicidal streak in him—some private worry, perhaps."

Q. Q. caressed his chin.

"Did Mr. Oglethorpe tell you precisely why I wanted to see you, Mr. Vaughan?"

"No. He merely said that you wished to talk to me on the matter."

Q. Q. nodded.

"Then I will tell you, Mr. Vaughan—and perhaps it would be as well if you regarded it as in confidence. There is reason to suspect that Mr. Arbuthnot did not commit suicide—but that he was shot by one of the clerks in his personal department—a clerk who had an urgent motive to suppress him promptly."

His eyes were fixed on Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan as he spoke, but Mr. Vaughan manifested only the startled vivification of interest normal in such circumstances.

"You mean—*murdered?*" he gasped.

"I mean murdered." The Chief was impressively specific.

"But—my dear sir!" Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan was obviously much perturbed. "It seems to me fantastic—Oglethorpe almost saw him shoot himself—he was in the room a moment later—before any murderer could have escaped!" He paused for a look of utter incredulity at Q. Q. "What grounds have you for such a wildly improbable theory? Who could possibly have shot Arbuthnot? Unless Oglethorpe did it himself—which is grotesquely absurd!"

"That is what we are going to try and find out, Mr. Vaughan," replied the Chief quietly. "I'm sure I can call upon you to give me any assistance in your power?"

"Certainly—certainly," said Mr. Vaughan, "of course! But what do you want me to do?"

"I'll explain." And Q. Q. explained to him, precisely as he had explained to Mr. Oglethorpe, the psychological test he proposed to apply to the six clerks. Mr. Vaughan accepted it unhesitatingly. "Of course, there must be no exceptions," he said.

Once more Q. Q. pronounced his list of words, dotted down the time-interval before the associated word came in answer. Mr. Vaughan replied to all with—so far as I could tell—an equally prompt rapidity. He was plainly a quick-brained, highly intelligent fellow.

"Thank you, Mr. Vaughan," said Q. Q. when he had finished—and again it was impossible for me to guess, through his quiet normality of tone and feature, whether or not he had discovered the clue he sought for. "And now perhaps you will be good enough to send across the others in order of their seniority. It is unnecessary," he added with a smile, "to tell them of the purpose for which I require them."

Three more clerks followed in due course and succession—Mr. Wainwright, Mr. Turner and Mr. Billmore. All three of them were most improbable murderers, for all three—Q. Q. checked their answers one against the other—had been in their office all the morning, had not

left it on any pretext until Mr. Oglethorpe had rushed in with the news of Arbuthnot's suicide. Nevertheless all three of them submitted to the test—and Q. Q. remained quietly smiling and inscrutable as they were successively dismissed.

The next—and last—to present himself was the junior, Mr. Johnson, a tall, nervous but pleasant-looking lad, scarcely in his twenties.

"Sit down, Mr. Johnson," said Q. Q., smiling at him and indicating the chair in which Johnson's predecessors had sat. "You were in the Registry at the time the tragedy occurred this morning?"

"Yes sir." The boy submitted easily to the quiet authority which emanated from Q. Q.'s personality. "I was searching for a file that had been mislaid."

"Between what times—precisely?"

"It was a little before ten to twelve when I left my room, sir. I returned at twenty minutes past." The lad was obviously nervous. He moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue before he spoke.

"So from ten to twelve to nearly twenty past you were in the Registry?"

"Yes sir."

Q. Q. looked at him penetratingly from under his heavy gray eyebrows.

"Very well. It is necessary for me to check all the statements I receive. I will just ring up the Registry and get them to confirm those times." He reached for the telephone.

"Don't do that, sir!" The lad had halfsprung from his chair.

"Why?"

"I did not tell you the truth, sir." I saw perspiration on the boy's brow; once more his tongue moistened his lips. He turned away his eyes from Q. Q.'s piercing scrutiny.

"Then please tell me the truth now!"

"Yes sir. I—I did not go straight to the Registry. I slipped out of the building."

"Out of the building? Why?"

"To send a telegram—at the post office across the road in Parliament Street."

"To whom did you send that telegram?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir."

Q. Q. frowned. I felt suddenly sorry for that lad, horrifyingly suspicious though were the circumstances that so suddenly gathered about him.

"Johnson!" The Chief's voice was sharply stern—a voice it was impossible not to obey. "You will tell me at once to whom you sent that telegram!"

The lad hesitated miserably. I saw his hands clench and unclench themselves, his face go white.

"It was to a money-lender, sir," he burst out after a moment when his voice seemed to have refused to function.

"A money-lender?"

"Yes—yes sir. I—I wanted to keep it a secret. He was threatening to denounce me to my chiefs if I did not pay today—you know what that would have meant, sir?" The boy spoke hurriedly now, imploringly. "I had written to my sister, telling her all about it. At a quarter to twelve I received a telegram from her—saying she would help me. Here it is, sir." The lad fished out a crumpled telegram from his pocket, held it out to Q. Q., who took it without removing his eyes from the soul under their scrutiny. "I dashed across to the post office to send a telegram to him telling him that my sister was paying—to take no action." The lad stopped breathlessly, his eyes miserably on Q. Q.'s inscrutable face.

The Chief glanced at the telegram.

"This is not very explicit," he said. "It merely says, 'All right, Vera.' That might mean anything. . . . Do you grasp the point of this questioning, Johnson?"

"No—no sir," the lad stuttered. "I—I don't think I do."

"The point is that Mr. Arbuthnot was murdered in his room at ten minutes past twelve. On your story, you left

the building at ten minutes before the hour. Where were you at ten minutes past?"

"In the post office, sir."

"From ten minutes to the hour to ten minutes past? Twenty minutes?"

"I had to wait in a queue, sir."

"And then you returned to the Registry?"

"Yes sir. I took the file I said I wanted, and went back to my room. It was then I first heard the news about poor Mr. Arbuthnot, sir."

"H'm! Well, the post-office records will prove the truth of your statements. Your telegram will note the time it was handed in. You say that was ten past?"

"No sir. The telegram was handed in at a quarter past. At ten past I was still waiting in the queue."

"Quarter past? How long, Johnson, did it actually take you to run down from the corridor where your room is situated, to the post office?"

"Under two minutes, sir."

"And you are sure—*quite sure*—that it was at ten minutes to the hour—and not just after ten minutes *past*—that you ran to the post office?" The implication in that question was terribly obvious.

"Yes sir."

"Well, I am going to test the truth of your story. Now listen to me—"

Again the Chief explained the method he was going to employ. "To answer is the only way of clearing yourself from the suspicion that now rests upon you," he said.

"Yes sir. But—believe me, sir—I know nothing about poor Mr. Arbuthnot's death—nothing—I swear to you, sir!" The lad was evidently horribly alarmed. "I was in the post office at the time, sir!"

Q. Q.'s eyes probed him.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Johnson. . . . And concentrate your mind on putting, as rapidly as possible, an associated word to the word I shall give you."

The boy gulped.

"Bread!"—dot-dot-dot.

"Butter!" He forced himself to the strain of an answer, hit the natural association which all his predecessors had given.

"Sea!"—dot-dot.

"Shore!"

"Horse!"—dot-dot-dot-dot.

"Hoof!"

Q. Q. took him right through the list, dotting the intervals of his hesitations, scribbling down his replies. The lad answered irregularly, spasmodically, a perspiration of distress upon his forehead, a look of terror in the eyes that stared as though hypnotized at Q. Q. It was all he could do, evidently, to keep his mind to the focus of what was required of him, and some of his associations were wildly wide—desperately clutched at in his anxiety to give a reply not too long delayed.

The Chief finished his inquisition, examined the paper with the irregular rows of dots, the final answers, compared them with the records of the others.

"H'm!" he grunted, his face inscrutable.

The lad sat staring at him, his hands twitching, scarcely daring—it would seem—to breathe.

The telephone bell rang sharply. Q. Q. took up the instrument.

"Hello? . . . Yes—Quayne speaking. . . . Who's that? . . . Oh, Sebright? . . . What? You've got your man? . . . Who is it? . . . Oglethorpe?" Q. Q. smiled, grimly. "Beware of those clear cases, Sebright. They're often only the mirror of your own ideas. I'm afraid you'll have to release Oglethorpe—with apologies. . . . Yes. *Why?* Because I happen to have caught the man, and it isn't Oglethorpe. I'll hand him over to you presently. . . . By the way, Sebright, where are you ringing up from? . . . The F. O.? Good! Would you mind asking Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan to step round here again as soon as possible? I've something important to speak to him about. . . . Thanks." Q. Q. put back the receiver.

Young Johnson had sprung to his feet, stood quivering

while Q. Q. talked. I watched him narrowly, my muscles tense to leap on him should he offer a sudden violence. There was a wild look in his frightened eyes.

"I—I didn't do it, sir!" he stammered.

The Chief smiled at him.

"I know you didn't," he said.

The boy stared, bewildered.

"Then—then—why have you asked Mr. Vaughan to come here, sir? You're not going to—to tell him about that money-lender?" There was a new and scarcely less acute alarm in his face. "For God's sake, don't, sir! Mr. Vaughan would report me at once!"

The Chief smiled again, more kindly.

"Not that, either. This experience in dealing with money-lenders will suffice you for a lifetime, I trust. That's all I have to say to you, Mr. Johnson." He nodded in dismissal.

Young Johnson still could not quite grasp the situation.

"You mean—you don't want me any more, sir?"

"No. And if you should meet Mr. Vaughan on your way back to your office, say nothing to him. Good afternoon."

Q. Q. turned back to those enigmatic papers which held a secret that tantalized my curiosity to a sudden fever-pitch.

"Goo-good-afternoon, sir!" The lad went out of that room, haunted for him by a dreadful ordeal, with a gladly eager haste that was almost a flight.

When he had gone, I looked across to the Chief.

"You've got your man, sir?"

Q. Q. glanced up at me, his face grimly satisfied in its expression.

"Yes."

"It looked bad for young Johnson, sir—and he seemed to stumble terribly when you applied your test." I was, of course, fishing, but it had in fact seemed to me more than once that the lad must be betraying himself, so desperate were his hesitations.

"Pooh! His time-intervals were of course wildly er-

ratic—what one would expect from the strain he was undergoing—but on the key-words he was no more erratic than elsewhere. Now, this record"—he held up another sheet of paper—"is curiously regular—the shortest intervals of any—till we come to those same vital words. And then there is a sudden seventy-five- to a hundred-per-cent increase—almost imperceptible while he spoke, but evident enough here. Moreover—automatically in his first quickness he gave the curious association *'hide'* to the word *'cupboard'*—the only one to do so; after that, recognizing his slip, he was on his guard—a little too much on his guard." He chuckled with satisfaction. "That's the man, Mr. Creighton!"

"Which man, sir?"

"Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan."

"D'Arcy Vaughan!" I echoed the name in astonishment. Mr. Vaughan had seemed to me the most normal of any of those six men who had sat in that chair—his answers unvarying in their glib rapidity. "And—you're going to arrest him, sir? Directly he comes in?" I thrilled with the sense of imminent crisis.

"Not quite as soon as that, Mr. Creighton. What I have here is evidence enough for myself. But it is not legal evidence. I'm going to get that legal evidence. I'm going to get a signed confession." His tone was curt with a confidence I did not share.

"D'Arcy Vaughan—if he's the man, sir—doesn't seem to me the sort of fellow to give confessions easily," I ventured. "He must have immense nerve to behave as he did in this office."

"He has—a phenomenal nerve. But even the strongest nerves can be broken down, Mr. Creighton." Q. Q. leaned back in his chair and smiled at me with a grim blandness. "You've heard of the third degree, I suppose? It usually implies some physical pain to the prisoner under examination. We're a little too civilized for that. I'm going to put Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan through what we may call the fourth degree—considerably more subtle and quite as efficacious."

"I don't understand, sir. Do I come in on this?"

"You, Mr. Creighton, will merely quietly get up and lock that door behind Mr. Vaughan when he enters, and then you will return to your desk, and get on with your work in absolute silence. You will not utter a word, unless I speak to you."

"Very good, sir." I was utterly baffled to guess what scheme Q. Q. had in his mind, but it was with an intense impatience that I watched the minute-hand slip round the clock. It was close on five. Perhaps Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan would after all smell a rat—not come? A feverish anxiety for his appearance mounted in me, obscured the petty routine task on which I was engaged.

The office telephone-bell rang, startling me in the tension of my nerves. The Chief answered it.

"Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan? Show him in, please." From his tone, he might have been admitting the most casual of visitors, but he smiled—a smile of intimate satisfaction—at me as he put back the receiver.

The door opened. Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan, sprucely elegant, his monocle in place, his good-looking features happily serene, entered the room. I rose, went unobtrusively behind him, locked the door, returned to my place. Mr. Vaughan advanced toward Q. Q.

"Well, Mr. Quayne," he said, in a voice that struck me as oddly cheerful for a man whose office had been the scene of such tragic events, "you've heard what's happened in this terrible business? They've arrested Oglethorpe—poor, queer old Oglethorpe! I would never have believed it possible, but Scotland Yard seems quite certain—and it knows its business, I suppose. Awful! Terrible—terrible!"

"Yes, I had heard," replied Q. Q. coolly.

Mr. Vaughan sat down in the chair, carefully deposited his glossy silk hat on a corner of Q. Q.'s desk, and casually crossed one nicely creased trouser-leg over the other. If he was indeed the man, I could not but admire his perfect aplomb.

"And now, Mr. Quayne," he said, "before we come to whatever you want to see me about, there's a little thing I'm curious to know. Did the results of your pyscho-analytic test by any chance coincide with those of the police?"

Q. Q. leaned back in his chair, tapped his finger-tips together.

"No," he replied, "they did not."

Mr. Vaughan smiled.

"Ah?" His tone politely indicated a previous skepticism that was now justified. "I trust you psycho-analysts will have the grace to acknowledge at least one failure of your magic methods."

Q. Q. continued to tap his finger-tips together as he smiled blandly.

"It was not a failure," he said.

"Not a failure? But—I do not understand—I thought you said—" Mr. Vaughan was all courtesy, a rather malicious courtesy, perhaps, in a gestured sketch of baffled comprehension. He smiled frankly, pleasantly, at his interlocutor.

"It was not a failure." Q. Q. had spoken these words in the quietest, most dulcet of his tones. He rose from his chair, stood erect, spoke in a voice that to me seemed like a thunderclap in its sudden stern vehemence. *"Own up, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan!* You're caught!"

The man had sprung up from his chair also in an indignation that, whether real or simulated, was impressive in its apparent authenticity.

"What do you mean?" His voice quivered, but it was with anger. "What are you trying to suggest?"

"I am suggesting, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan,"—Q. Q.'s tone was sharply explicit—"that you are a spy in your own department, that you were betraying official secrets, that Mr. Arbuthnot detected you, called you into his room this morning as you passed on your way to lunch and taxed you with it, that he had the imprudence, perhaps, to threaten you—possibly in self-defense—with his revolver during the altercation, that you seized that re-

volver and shot him dead, that hearing some one come to the door, you then sprang into the clothes-cupboard and dodged out again directly the coast was clear. Is that definite enough for you?"

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan looked as though he were going to strike his accuser in the face. I saw his fists clench, the lips go blanched under his little dark mustache. He mastered himself with an effort.

"Mr. Quayne, if you were a younger man, I would thrash you for this outrageous imputation!" he gasped in his wrath. "As it is, you have chosen to utter this monstrous slander before a witness." He jerked his hand in my direction. "You shall hear from my solicitors!" He strode toward the door.

Fascinated, I watched him as he reached it, tugged at the handle, twisted it in vain. Then he swung round again, his face ablaze with fury.

"Open that door at once!" he cried. "What does this mean?"

"It means, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan," said Q. Q. in his most coldly level tones, "that you are a prisoner in this room until such time as you dictate and sign your confession."

The man glared at him, livid. He could scarcely speak in the rage which choked him.

"This is an outrage—a monstrous outrage! You dare, Mr. Quayne—*you dare* to subject a civil servant of my standing to this gross indignity! To illegal detention! Have a care, Mr. Quayne! You are laying yourself open to an action which I will fight through court after court till I ruin you!"

Q. Q. smiled grimly.

"You may have another case to fight in the courts before that, Mr. Vaughan. It is useless to wrestle with that door. You cannot open it."

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan had once more switched round to the door, was tugging at it, twisting at the handle in an almost maniacal fury of anger. He faced round again to Q. Q.

"Open it, I say! Open it," he choked, "or—"

"Or nothing, Mr. Vaughan." Q. Q. was smoothly unruffled. "You will do nothing. You will merely in due course, when you are tired of raging at that door, sit down in that chair and dictate your confession." With which, Q. Q. himself calmly resumed his seat, picked up a paper on his desk and apparently gave it his undivided cool attention.

Mr. Vaughan stared at him for a moment, the muscles of his face twitching, his eyes murderous if ever a man's were—and then he strode straight across to me.

"You!" The violence in his voice startled me, half-prepared for it though I was. "Open that door at once—or I charge you as an accomplice in this felony! *Felony*—you understand! Penal servitude!" Ugly menace looked out of him. I gripped myself, remembered Q. Q.'s orders, remained stolidly silent, bent over my work again. *"Do you hear?"* My shoulder was violently shaken. "Open that door, or—" He had no threat vicious enough for his anger.

I glanced at him, as coolly as I could,—obviously my cue was to imitate the Chief, at that moment quite unperturbed, apparently engrossed in the perusal of some document,—saw the ferocity in his glare, saw his fingers working—itching for a weapon which, thank Heaven, he did not possess—and remained dumb. Not only dumb, but, as well as I could feign it, deaf! Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan, I could see in the instant before my eyes went down to my work again, could have screamed blasphemies in the extremity of his exasperation. The uncanny completeness of our silence sent a gleam of fright into his eyes. Then once more they went impotently murderous. I guessed, even as with an effort of self-command I turned my gaze away from him, that he was speculating whether he would have a chance in a hand-to-hand mix-up with the pair of us.

Apparently he decided that he would not. I felt him remove his presence from over me, glanced up discreetly

to see him once more in the center of the room, facing the Chief.

"Mr. Quayne!" He controlled his voice to a harsh similitude of normality. "Do you mean that you have the insane intention of keeping me a prisoner in this room until I sign a confession of a murder of which I know nothing?"

Q. Q. raised his eyes to him, as though only just again aware of his presence.

"You are begging the question, Mr. Vaughan," he said quietly, turning over a page of his papers while he spoke. "I have all the relevant information. I require only your confession. And it is certainly my intention to keep you here till I get it."

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan achieved a short scornful laugh.

"Very well," he said. "We shall see who can wait longest." He flung himself into the chair, sat tapping with his foot upon the floor. "You yourselves cannot sit forever in this room. And when we leave it, Mr. Quayne, believe me, you shall rue this outrage!"

Mr. Quayne merely turned over another page of the document he was perusing with such concentrated attention.

His victim glared at him, opened his cigarette-case,—I noticed, maliciously, that it contained only one cigarette,—struck a match, commenced to smoke. The silence of that room, high above the neighboring housetops, was like the grave. It perpetuated itself, continued until even I felt it a strain upon my nerves. The only sound was the deep breathing of that man in the chair adjacent to Q. Q.'s desk. Unobtrusively I kept a sharp eye upon him, alert to interpose in that sudden panther-spring I felt to be imminent. But none came. Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan sat immobile, his lips pressed tight, smoking with the tiniest of puffs, evidently—I could sympathize with him—trying to economize that one and only cigarette to the last possible moment. And the silence in that room continued, persisted till it seemed to ring in my ears.

I glanced at the clock-hand. It marked half-past five.

Mr. Vaughan stirred.

"Mr. Quayne!"

Q. Q. lifted an eyebrow at him.

"How long is this madness to continue?"

"Until I get your confession." Q. Q.'s tone was quietly acceptive of the situation, was, without the faintest impatience, coolly confident of the final result.

"Pshaw!" The man jumped up from his chair again, paced up and down the room in febrile exasperation. Q. Q. had once more reverted to the perusal of his documents, did not so much as glance at him. The victim strode once more across to me, evidently on the impulse to make another trial of my subordinate resolution. I forced myself to remain unperceptive of his presence. I could feel the glare of his eyes upon me as I bent my own down to my work, could feel him hesitate over the utility of the appeal—or of the threat. He renounced either. I heard his soft footfalls on the carpet recede away to the center of the room, heard them go toward Q. Q.'s desk, heard the sudden creak of his chair as he flung himself down into it again.

When, discreetly, I glanced up, I saw him sitting there, his fingers drumming on his knee, the cigarette short between his lips glowing in a momentary forgetfulness of economy.

The silence continued. The ticking of the clock became insistent, an obsession to the ear. Its hands slipped round —six o'clock—a quarter past. Outside, the light began to die out of the sky. Within the room there were already shadows. Long ago Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan had got to the end of his smoke. For what seemed an age he had sat like a statue, utterly motionless. What was he thinking, I wondered. And still the silence remained unbroken.

It was shattered suddenly.

"Quayne!" The man paused, waiting for a movement of Q. Q.'s head that did not occur. "I don't know how long this farce is going on—but I'll count it as mitigation if you'll give me a cigarette."

But Mr. Quayne had apparently lost the sense of

hearing. He merely picked another from the pile of documents at his hand.

Once more the room relapsed into silence—into a silence that grew haunted, terrifying, vibrant with mysterious unuttered menace as the twilight deepened in the room—a silence that *rang* and yet was soundless. A sudden mutter from the man in the chair seemed only to intensify it. How long indeed was this going on? I myself grew unnerved with the strain, felt the impulse to use my voice—to break this uncanny hush—rise up in me, almost irresistible. Had I been sitting there with the guilt of murder on my conscience, I could not have refrained from shouting it aloud to get relief at any cost from this intolerable ordeal of soundlessness wherein the stark fundamental outlines of one's soul seemed automatically to emerge. I should have screamed that guilt, in hysteria, long ago. But still the man I could half-see in the gloom sat motionless and silent in his chair. Still, Q. Q. remained, holding up a document to get the last of the light, seemingly oblivious of his presence. For myself, I had given up even the pretense of work. I sat, gripped in that dead hush, and waited—waited—while the shadows thickened.

Suddenly I heard a sound—the faintest little whir; and then—

"He shall confess, Mr. Quayne—I am determined on it!"

The voice came out of the gloom, silent, deep-toned, vibrant with authority—the voice of the murdered Arbuthnot! Even to me, who could an instant later guess its source, it came with a shock to my nerves, uncanny from the formless shadows of the room. To the man in the chair, it came with the full force of a supernatural presence—sternly inexorable in a ghostly omnipotence. He sprang to his feet, stood quivering.

"What was that? Quayne, did you hear that? *Arbuthnot's voice!* I—I—no—it couldn't be—couldn't be! Quayne,"—his voice was strained with terror,—"let me out of this! I'm going mad! I can't stand it any longer!"

Q. Q. apparently did not hear him. He did not move. One hand still held the document up to the last glimmer of outside light; the other was out of sight beneath his desk. Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan gasped. Once more he turned toward me, and I saw his two hands go slowly, quiveringly, up toward his head as he stood silhouetted against the window. The man was gripped in a paroxysm of terror at those suddenly vocal shadows all around him—*at himself.*

"No," I heard him whisper to himself, "no! It couldn't have been! It couldn't have been!"

And then once more came that solemn, deep-toned, authoritative voice:

"He shall confess, Mr. Quayne—I am determined on it!"

A choked scream broke from the tortured wretch.

"No—no! Quiet, Arbuthnot! *Quiet—for God's sake!* I —can't bear it! I—I'll tell—I'll confess! I'll confess! Quayne—*Quayne!"* His voice came almost in a shriek from the shadows which hid his face. "I'll confess—I'll confess! Take it down—I'll confess!"

Q. Q. laid down his papers.

"Take down what Mr. Vaughan dictates, Mr. Creighton," he said, quietly. "Resume your chair, Mr. Vaughan." He touched the switch by his desk, and the room was suddenly flooded with light.

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan, no longer the spruce, well-groomed civil servant, but a haggard, wild-eyed wretch,— I was startled at the havoc the ordeal had made in him,— obeyed like a creature drained of volition, dropped heavily into his chair. I took up my pen and wrote as, quaveringly, gaspingly, the utterly unnerved, broken man began his confession. It was a confession of official secrets betrayed, sent by agony-column code-messages to a great foreign commercial organization to which they were of immense utility, of—precisely as Q. Q. had divined—Arbuthnot's having stopped him as he went along the corridor to his lunch, taxed him with it, of a wild alarm, a determination to suppress this danger at once, of the beginnings of a

murderous struggle in which Arbuthnot had snatched the revolver from his drawer, of another snatch at that revolver which had seized it, of the sudden shot, of Oglethorpe at the door, of a spring into the clothes-cupboard, and a moment later—when Oglethorpe had dashed out again, horrified at the discovery—a quick rush along the corridor, unobserved, to lunch.

Q. Q. listened, inscrutable, to the end.

"Now sign, Mr. Vaughan," he said in his quiet level voice.

The man got up from his chair, moved toward my desk —stopped suddenly.

"No!" he cried. Obviously he made a great effort to pull himself together, to resume command of himself, seemed to succeed. "No! I won't sign!" He laughed like a maniac. "It's only your word against mine—both of you—and I'll swear it's a fabrication—a tissue of lies! I'm not going to sign away my life because you played a trick on me! How you did it, I don't know—but trick I'm sure it was!"

He stood glowering defiance at Q. Q.

"As you like, Mr. Vaughan," said the Chief quietly. "It makes really no difference whether you sign or not. Just listen a moment!" He bent forward, touched something on his desk. "Another little trick, Mr. Vaughan." He smiled pleasantly.

To my own astonishment there issued into the room, startlingly lifelike, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan's voice in a recapitulated, word-for-word recital of his crime. The first few sentences of it were sufficient—Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan raised his hand. To his first amazement had succeeded a sudden bitterness of comprehension.

"That's enough," he said. "I don't want to hear it over again." He controlled his voice to a cynical appreciation. "A dictaphone, of course?"

"A double-barreled one, Mr. Vaughan," said the Chief, still pleasantly. "With a blank record waiting for you."

Vaughan glared at Q. Q. in a sudden last flash of ferocity. "Curse you and your infernal cunning tricks!" he said. "All right—I may as well sign." He came across

to my desk, scrawled a signature at the foot of the paper I presented to him, turned again with a snarl to the Chief. "Now what are you going to do?"

Q. Q. smiled grimly, took off the telephone receiver, asked for a number.

"Sebright? . . . Ah, Quayne speaking. Just come round here, will you? . . . I've got that man for you. Yes—signed confession. He's only waiting for you."

EDWIN BAIRD

THE MYSTERY OF THE LOCKED DOOR

CALVIN MCCREADY, chief of police at Glenwood, unhooked his telephone receiver.

"Hello!" said he. "What's wanted?"

A frightened feminine voice shrilled excitedly in his ear:

"Is this the police station? . . . Then come out here quick! We've been robbed! Burglars broke in last night. I just discovered it. They broke in through the pantry window. Stole all our silver plate, and broke open a cedar chest, where I kept the linen, and upset the house——"

The breathless torrent of words was interrupted at this point by Chief McCready:

"If you don't mind tellin' me, ma'm, I'd like for to know whose house you're talkin' about."

"This is Amos Caldwell's house," screamed the sharp little voice. "Do hurry! It's two miles north of town, on Glenview Road——"

"I know where it is," said the chief, again interrupting her. "But who's this talkin'?"

"I'm Mr. Caldwell's housekeeper—Mrs. Harriet Farson. If you'll only hurry——"

"I'll start right away," he promised, and dropped the receiver in its hook, took his hat and coat from a peg near the desk, lit a five-cent cigar, and sauntered to the rear of the village lockup, where his flivver was parked. Presently he was journeying north in Glenview Road, through the crisp autumnal morning, toward the country estate of Amos Caldwell, retired millionaire. Chief of Police McCready—who also, of course, was the entire police force of Glenwood—was familiar with the eccentricities of "old

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man" Caldwell; and he was wondering now why burglars should want to enter his home, and, having entered, what they would find worth stealing.

After his wife's death Caldwell had sold his luxurious home in Chicago and made his permanent abode in this old-fashioned country place, once used by his family only as a summer residence; and here, for all his wealth, he lived in the utmost frugality. Of late years he had become known among the villagers as a "cracked" old miser and recluse. He never visited his neighbors, rarely if ever received a caller, had no intercourse with the outside world, and seldom saw anybody except his housekeeper and gardener.

When Chief McCready turned into the graveled driveway, which wound upward between two rows of hard maples to a huge brick mansion on a knoll, he saw these two persons awaiting him on the front veranda.

"I was never so upset in my life!" cried the woman, hurrying nervously down the steps to meet him. "I do hope you can catch those burglars. They might have murdered me! I never dreamed the house had been robbed till I came downstairs this morning, about seven o'clock, just before I telephoned you, and found everything topsy-turvy, sideboard drawers open and things scattered about helter-skelter. But come inside and I'll show you."

In a garrulous flutter, she preceded him into a wide reception-hall, quite bare of furniture or ornamentation, save for an old broken chair and a threadbare rug.

"These lower rooms," she rambled on, entering a doorway to the left, "haven't been used since Mrs. Caldwell died, twenty years ago. They've never been opened, except when I cleaned and dusted. And now just look at 'em!" She made an exasperated gesture.

McCready, following her, beheld two high-ceilinged drawing-rooms and a dining-room beyond, which, in marked contrast to the hall, were furnished in splendor—the faded splendor of a bygone day. He remembered now that when Mrs. Caldwell was alive this house had been

noted as a gathering-place for the wealth and fashion of her time.

The decaying grandeur of the old-style room was now in wild disorder. Massive mahogany cabinets had been roughly opened and their contents scattered broadcast, costly oil paintings were ripped from their frames and piled on the floor, the dining-room buffet was plundered, the drawers pillaged, and a heavy escritoire and an upholstered couch were turned upside down.

Each piece of furniture, in fact, had been moved from its accustomed place and violently mistreated, and the floor of every room was strewn with all manner of things. McCready, picking his way through the wreckage, was puzzled. This senseless confusion and wanton destruction didn't suggest burglars to his mind. It suggested vandals.

He turned to the woman, whose tongue was still churning tirelessly, and cut in on her talkativeness:

"You say you knew nothin' about this till this morning? Didn't you hear any sounds in these rooms last night?"

"Nothing," she said firmly. "I sleep on the third floor, and I never knew what had happened till I came down this morn——"

"And *you,*" said McCready, turning to the gardener, who had silently followed them through the rooms, "didn't you hear anything, either?"

"He sleeps in the stable," exclaimed the housekeeper. "How could *he* hear anything——"

"How about it?" asked McCready, ignoring the woman and addressing the man. "Did you hear anything, or not?"

"I didn't hear nawthin'," grumbled the gardener, breaking his silence for the first time.

McCready surveyed the disordered furniture, recklessly scattered around him, and scratched his stubbled chin in perplexity. He was thinking that whoever moved this furniture must have made considerable noise.

"Where's Mr. Caldwell?" he asked the housekeeper.

"In his room upstairs, asleep. He never comes near these rooms; hasn't been in 'em for years and years—not

since Mrs. Caldwell died. When he sees what's happened here——"

"We'll wake 'im up and tell 'im," decided McCready, starting for the hall stairway.

"Not just yet! Please!" Her voice atremble with apprehension, she seized his arm entreatingly. "Don't wake him yet," she implored. "You see, he's awfully peculiar, full of strange notions and such. He holds these rooms sacred—keeps 'em locked up and never goes near them—and when he sees how they've been desecrated——"

"He's got to know *some* time," argued McCready. "He might as well know now."

"But I dread to tell him what's happened. You don't know him as I do! Besides, he never gets up till nine o'clock, and it's hardly eight. If we wake him up now——"

"I'll take the responsibility for that," said the chief. "Come on; show me his room."

He shook off her detaining hand, and, heedless of her expostulation, ascended to the upper hall, which, like the hall below, was destitute of adornment, denoting poverty rather than riches.

She followed him reluctantly, loquaciously remonstrating, and pointed to a door near the front end of the corridor.

"That's his room," she said, and in palpable agitation watched McCready knock on the panel.

Getting no response, he rapped more loudly and sharply called: "Hello in there! Wake up!"

Still no reply. He tried the doorknob. The door was locked. Finally, despite the housekeeper's vigorous objection, he stood on a chair and looked into the room through the transom window.

It was a small chamber, meagerly furnished, and on a shabby old couch-bed near a closed window lay Amos Caldwell, his back to the door, his fringe of white hair showing above the bed clothes. Again McCready called to him, fairly shouting his name, but the man on the bed never moved.

"There's something mighty strange here—" stepping down from the chair. "Have you got a key to this door?"

The housekeeper shook her head. "There's only one key," she told him—"the one Mr. Caldwell uses. He locks himself in every night."

"Then we'll have to break in," said McCready, and hurled his weight against the oaken panel.

After a few moments of this, he broke the lock and opened the door. He walked inside to the dilapidated couch and shook the shoulder of the man lying there. And then, all at once, he straightened up, with a sudden intake of breath. He saw now why Caldwell hadn't answered.

He turned and beckoned to the housekeeper, who stood in the doorway, her face white, eyes staring apprehensively.

"What's happened?" she asked in a nervous whisper. "Is anything the matter with him? Can't you wake him up?"

"No," said McCready, quietly. "Nobody can wake 'im up. Mr. Caldwell is dead."

Fifteen minutes later, or a little past eight o'clock on that autumnal morning, Thomas Caldwell, only son of Amos Caldwell, and the only surviving near relative, received a long-distance telephone call at his bachelor apartment in Chicago, from Chief McCready.

"Your father is dead," said the chief, "and I'm not sure whether he died a natural death, or was murdered. The circumstances look mighty mysterious. I've sent for the coroner, who'll soon tell us what killed 'im."

McCready then described in detail what had happened, from the moment he was notified of the burglary until he broke into the elder Caldwell's room.

"The thing that's puzzlin' me now," he concluded, "is how the burglars got in your father's bedroom—assumin' they *did* get in—because, when I found 'im, the door was locked on the inside and the window was closed and bolted. Of course, I don't know that they killed your father. There's no marks o' violence on his body, nothin'

to show he was murdered. But the coroner will clear that up. You'll be comin' out right away, I take it?"

"Yes, of course. There's a train leaving for Glenwood in thirty minutes. I'll come on that train."

Young Caldwell, stunned by the shock, was now emerging from his daze. He telephoned his office, hastily explained what had happened, then called a taxicab and hurried to the office of Herbert Barry, Sales Manager of the Fidelity Check Protector Company. Barry's skill as an amateur detective was equal to his ability in salesmanship—and he was recognized as one of the best salesmen in the business. Detective work was his only hobby, and he never missed a chance to indulge it.

"Grab your hat, Herbert. Important case. We've got to make a train in ten minutes. I'll explain on the way. Hurry!" . . . A frantic dash in the taxicab—and they caught the rear platform of the last coach of the Glenwood train as it moved from the railroad station.

An hour later, in a village hack, they drove to Thomas Caldwell's ancestral home, and were met at the front door by Chief McCready, Mrs. Farson, the housekeeper, and Otto Grusendorf, the gardener. To each of them the sales-manager detective was introduced merely as "Mr. Ennis," with no word to account for his presence here.

As he shook hands with them, his keen eyes noted their salient characteristics—thus: McCready, lantern-jawed; drooping black mustache; bushy eyebrows; dark brown eyes; lanky build; careless dress; commonsense; methodical mind. Mrs. Farson: angular; pointed chin; bony hands; prominent cheekbones; gray hair; excitable; quick-tempered; impulsive; over-talkative; age, fifty-odd. Grusendorf: thick; heavy-set; wide face; stolid eyes; leathery hands; phlegmatic; taciturn; age, fifty.

"The coroner's upstairs," McCready informed young Caldwell. "I guess you'll be wantin' to see 'im?"

"Yes; at once."

They found Coroner Felix Webb in the senior Cald-

well's bedroom, crawling about on hands and knees and diligently searching the floor.

"I'm looking for a hypodermic syringe," he explained, "that ought to be in this room. I've hunted everywhere, but can't seem to find it. Did you happen to see it, McCready?"

"No," said McCready, "and nobody else has been in this room. I guarded it myself till you come."

"Strange! It ought to be here, then. . . . I've made a post-mortem examination," added the coroner, turning to Tom Caldwell, "and I find that your father died from an over-dose of cocaine, hypodermically injected. The evidence indicates that his death was self-inflicted, but whether from suicidal intent, or accidentally——"

"It was neither!" blazed young Caldwell, flushing hotly. "My father was never addicted to drugs, and as for suicide —that, of course, is preposterous! If he died from poison, as you say, it was given to him by somebody else, and against his will."

Coroner Webb, disconcerted by this sudden upflare, said in a conciliatory tone: "The fact that the syringe can't be found *does* indicate, I admit, that death was homicidal; *but*—and here's the thing we can't overcome—if it *was* homicide, how did the murderer enter and leave this room? As you see, there is only one door and one window here; and when your father's body was found the window was bolted tight, and the door was also locked—*on the inside.*"

Tom gazed hopelessly around the room, and his eyes came to rest on the transom window. But it was quite obvious that no human being, save possibly a dwarf, could have entered that way. The opening was scarcely twelve inches wide.

Barry, who had been silently examining the chamber, seeing much and saying nothing, quietly interposed at this point:

"When you broke down the door," he asked McCready, "where did you find the key?"

"It was layin' just about here," said the chief, indicating

with his foot a spot near the threshold. "I musta jolted it out o' the lock."

Barry offered no comment, but spoke to the coroner:

"In what part of Mr. Caldwell's body was the hypodermic injection made?"

"On the left side, about two inches above the heart."

"Any other needle marks on his body?"

"None that I can find."

"Thank you." Then to young Caldwell: "Let's take a look at the rooms below."

The debris in these lower rooms possessed a potent fascination for Barry. With absorbed interest, he carefully inspected the broken furniture and demolished ornaments, devoting particular attention to the stuffed chairs and divans, which had been ripped open and disembowled as though in a spirit of willful destruction.

He spent upward of forty minutes here, searching through the wreckage; then he beckoned to Tom and walked outdoors.

"Have you any idea," he asked, when they were some distance from the house, "what your father had hidden in those first-floor rooms?"

"So far as I know," said Tom, "he had nothing hidden there. As a matter of fact, he never used those rooms at all. They've been sealed up for twenty years—ever since my mother's death."

Barry narrowed his gray eyes thoughtfully. "Then that gives us Problem One," he murmured, as one who thinks aloud.

"But what of my father's death?" demanded young Caldwell. "Surely that is far more important, and far more mystifying, than this sordid burglary?"

"No," disagreed Barry. "As I see it, the two dovetail. Solve one, and you've solved the other. There's no doubt in my mind that your father was murdered——"

"But how?" interrupted Tom. "How could the murderer leave the room and lock the door on the *inside?*"

"That puzzle," smiled Barry, "is childishly simple. The murderer opened the door, walked in, killed your father,

walked out, locked the door, and tossed the key over the transom."

"Well, by George. Why didn't *I* think of that? Of course that was what he did. At any rate, it *could* be done."

"It *was* done," declared Barry. "That your father did not kill himself is proved by what the coroner says. Only the most desperate drug addict will shoot dope near his heart. The beginner invariably chooses the forearm. Your father was not even a beginner, as is shown by the absence of scars on his body. Also, the fact that the hypodermic needle wasn't found in his room, and cannot be found now, explodes the theory of suicide. So much for that.

"The thing that is puzzling me now," he went on, "is the object of the raid on those first-floor rooms. What were the raiders looking for? Or what did they *think* they were looking for? When we've answered that . . . Oh, by the way," he suddenly asked, "this Mrs. Farson—how long has she been in your father's service?"

"At least twenty years," replied Tom. "I remember I was only a kid when she came. Nothing wrong with her, old man; I'm sure of that. She was inordinately devoted to my father; understood and humored all his whims. He trusted her implicitly."

"And the gardener, Grusendorf?"

"He's been here ten years or so. Always honest and faithful."

The young men strolled on beneath the elms which shaded the sloping lawn, in grave silence, each occupied with his thoughts. Presently Barry looked back at the house.

"I think they're getting ready for the inquest in there, so perhaps we'd better go back. It may shed some light on the thing."

The inquest, however, served only to darken the mystery. Mrs. Farson, the first witness, testified that she had gone to bed at her usual hour the night before (about ten o'clock), in her room at the rear of the third floor, had slept soundly through the night, and had come downstairs

about seven o'clock that morning—to find the house had been burglarized. In her voluble way, she told of calling the gardener, of notifying the police, and of the subsequent discovery that the master of the house was dead.

Her testimony was corroborated, in the main, by that of Grusendorf and Chief McCready. Nor could the questioning of Coroner Webb cause her to change a jot of it. The inquest was conducted in the front drawing-room, and during this interrogation the coroner, gesturing toward the surrounding disorder, said:

"It's evident, Mrs. Farson, that a lot of noise was made here last night. Are you positive you heard no sound whatever?"

"*Absolutely* positive," she declared emphatically. "If I'd heard anything I'd tell you."

"Your bedroom door was closed?"

"Closed and locked. I always lock it before I——"

"Do you know of any reason, Mrs. Farson, why anybody should want to kill Mr. Caldwell?"

"My land, no!" she exclaimed, with a gesture. "Who'd want to harm that poor old man? Why, he hadn't an enemy in the whole countryside—or anywhere else, for that matter. It's still hard for me to believe he was really murdered——"

"Have you any reason to believe," Coroner Webb asked quickly, "that his death came otherwise?"

She hesitated, her eyes lowered, her thin fingers twisting in nervous agitation.

"No," she said finally, and shook her head. "I just simply can't understand it."

The hearing was adjourned, the coroner's jury (composed of villagers, drawn to the old mansion by curiosity) gradually dispersed, and Chief McCready, smoking another of his cheap cigars, departed leisurely in his flivver to seek the housebreakers.

Barry, who had remained quietly in a corner during the proceedings, approached Mrs. Farson as she was leaving the room.

"Would you mind telling me," he smilingly asked, "just what was stolen here last night?"

"Not at all," she replied. "They stole 'most everything they could carry off—all the silver plate, and a lot of bric-a-brac and things. I gave Mr. McCready a complete description."

"And now, Mrs. Farson," he continued, lowering his voice so that the others could not hear, "please tell me what the burglars were *really looking for*."

She was visibly startled by the question. Drawing sharply back, as though he had slapped her in the face, she stared at him in an odd, curious way. For the first time, perhaps, in her life, she was at a loss for speech.

"I—I don't—understand you," she stammered at last, with a perceptible effort to regain her composure. "What d'you mean, anyway? What *shoula* they be looking for?"

"That is what I am asking you." He smiled engagingly. "It is so perfectly obvious," he went on, motioning to the débris in the room, "that they were not merely seeking plate and such stuff, but something smaller, something infinitely more precious——"

"Well, if you're so smart," she cut in tartly, "find out for yourself what it was they were 'seeking'!"

And she swung crisply on her heel and left him.

He gazed after her, a wraith of the smile still lingering on his lips, a puzzled expression in his eyes; then, shrugging, he walked slowly into the adjoining room, and from thence into the dining-room beyond, his brows drawn together in mental concentration. The riddle was growing more complex.

While poking about in the dining-room, all his faculties centered on this riddle, he heard the housekeeper's voice beyond the door that led to the butler's-pantry. Unhesitatingly, he tiptoed nearer the door, and, under pretense of examining a broken teapot lying nearby, keenly listened. He gathered that she was in the kitchen, talking with two of her neighbors (a Mrs. Stacey and a Mrs. Lumbard),

whom he had noticed at the inquest; and he now overheard one of the women say:

"It must be a turrible shock to ye, ma'am. I wonder you stand it as well as ye do."

"I'm worn to a shred," grieved the housekeeper's voice, "what with the police and the coroner and all. And as if that wasn't quite enough, Mr. Thomas brings a young upstart from the City——"

"Oh, I meant to ask you, Mrs. Farson,"—this from the third woman,—"where's Cordelia?"

An appreciable silence followed this query. Then Barry heard Mrs. Farson say in a noticeably altered tone:

"Cordelia is gone. She disappeared last night. I'm afraid she won't ever return—*ever!*"

Hereon the other two women, singly and together, exclaimed with commiseration:

"What a pity! How you must miss her! Cordelia was so devoted to you! Did she run away, or . . ."

And now, quite suddenly, there came from the kitchen sounds of tearful lamentation. Unquestionably, Mrs. Farson was sobbing as though her heart would break! It also was clear that her friends were unable to stem this flood of anguish.

Barry turned from the door, the broken teapot in his lean hands, crossed to a west window of the dining-room, and stood gazing unseeingly across a meadow bathed in autumnal sunlight. The vertical line between his brows deepened. He was still standing here, in deep absorption, when Grusendorf, raking dead leaves from the lawn, came within sight.

He promptly put the teapot aside and started from the house. In the lower front hall he encountered Tom, who accompanied him outdoors to ask in a somewhat apologetic way:

"What have you said to Farson, old man? She tells me you've insulted her. Seemed quite peeved about it."

"I asked her a question," said Barry, "which nobody yet has answered. I'm sorry it offended her. I hope it won't offend the gardener, for I intend putting the same question

to him. But first, I want to ask *you* something: who, or what, is Cordelia?"

"Cordelia? I don't believe I know—Oh, yes, I do, too!" laughed Tom. "Cordelia is Farson's cat. An aged Maltese. Twelve years old, if it's a day. Farson raised it from kittenhood. Now you remind me of it, I haven't seen it around today."

"It disappeared last night," said Barry, "so Mrs. Farson says."

"That's a hard blow for her! Cordelia is the apple of her eye. She fairly worships the creature. But it'll come back, of course. You can't drive a cat away from its home."

"Mrs. Farson seems to think it's gone for good. Perhaps somebody stole it."

"Heaven help the thief if she ever catches him! She'd boil him in oil. I remember once, some years ago, I accidentally hurt the animal, and Farson flew at me in a rage, furious enough to scratch out my eyes."

"Mrs. Farson, I venture to say, has never been a mother?"

"She's a childless widow."

"That probably accounts for it. The maternal instinct in every woman must somehow find an outlet. In her case, I suppose, this outlet was supplied by a cat. She lavished upon it, evidently, all the affection which Nature gave her for her offspring—a perversion we all have noticed. . . . But I must ask Grusendorf a question or two. Care to come along?"

They walked to the side lawn, where the phlegmatic gardener was morosely raking the dead leaves into a heap and loading them upon a wheelbarrow. His habitual reticence was gradually broken down by Barry, who manifested a lively and intelligent interest in horticultural subjects; and presently they were chatting, with a fair degree of amiability, of the gorgeously-colored asters, the bright-hued, salvia border, the heavily-laden fruit trees, and of the most effective insecticides and fertilizers and kindred matters.

With all these things Barry displayed an unusual

familiarity (he had once been a salesman for a wholesale nursery), and he clearly was gaining the respect and confidence of Grusendorf until, in the course of conversation, he casually asked:

"Do you happen to know, Mr. Grusendorf, whether or not Mr. Caldwell had anything of considerable value hidden in his house?"

The gardener's tobacco-stained teeth came together with a *click*. At once his face assumed its stolid mask. He remained silent. Barry repeated the question.

"I don't know nawthin' about it," growled the old man, bruskly returning to his work.

"You know, of course," began Barry, pleasantly, "that Cordelia——"

He abruptly paused. Instantly, as the cat's name was uttered, an extraordinary change had come over Grusendorf. The rake fell from his nerveless hands, and he stood, apparently stupefied with fear, staring at his interrogator, his rheumy eyes wide, his mouth agape, his mien expressing a nameless terror.

"W-what about Cordelia?" he finally asked, barely above a whisper.

"She's gone, as you know. I thought perhaps you could tell us——"

"I can't tell you nawthin'!" the gardener cut in savagely. "Don't come talkin' to me about Cordelia!" Then, evidently fearing to trust himself further, he picked up his rake and hurried off, in his stoop-shouldered fashion, to the garden at the rear.

"Well, what the devil," gasped Tom, "d'you suppose is wrong with *him?*"

"I don't know," said Barry, after a pause, "but I'm going to find out. Could you, on some pretext, manage to get Mrs. Farson away for several hours?"

"I'll try. But what's the idea?"

"I want to search the house, if you'll permit me. It's impossible, of course, while she is here."

"You've my permission to search all you please; but how can I keep her out of your way?"

"Hire an automobile at the Glenwood garage and take her to Chicago. Tell her you must see your father's lawyer and need her signature on some legal papers. Then you can 'discover' the lawyer is out of town and drive her back. That'll give me four or five hours here alone."

Thirty minutes later, from an upper window, Barry watched Tom and the housekeeper depart; and when the motor-car had vanished down Glenview Road in a swirl of dust he went forthwith to the woman's room on the third floor. The door was locked; but a skeleton key, which he always carried, easily unlocked it.

The first thing he noticed, as he entered the room, was a large photograph of a Maltese cat, expensively framed and propped against the mirror of an old-fashioned bureau. As he stepped forward to examine this, a furry object rubbed purringly against his ankle, and he looked down to see a Maltese cat that seemed a replica of the one in the picture. Indeed, when he picked the animal up and held it to the light beside the photograph, he could discern between them no particle of difference.

Except these two things,—the cat and the photograph,—the room yielded nothing of interest to him; although he searched it most carefully, even opening the mattress and pillow with his penknife. Dissatisfied, he went out and locked the door; then, starting in the attic, he systematically and assiduously searched every foot of the house.

He had reached the basement and was rummaging through the objects there when the mellow *honk-k* of a motor siren, coming from the driveway, warned him of Tom's return. The quest was ended and he had found nothing of value—no trace of cocaine, or any other poison, or a hypodermic syringe, or aught that would give him the slightest clue.

When Tom and Mrs. Farson entered the lower hall, "Mr. Ennis," was sitting near a window of his room, at the rear of the second floor, calmly reading (apparently) a book he had found in the basement—a tattered volume entitled "*Anatomy of the Cat.*"

Some nine hours later, or well past midnight, he was again sitting at his window; but he was not reading now, or even pretending to read. The room was dark and the window was open, and he sat on the ledge, smoking his pipe and gazing down through the scented darkness into the fragrant garden below. It was a warm night, unusually warm for autumn, and he had removed the greater part of his clothing.

The thought of going to bed had not occurred to him. He could not sleep, or think of sleep, until he had solved the mystery here. The solution, he believed, was almost in his grasp; yet, like a will-o'-the-wisp, it eluded and tantalized him.

For an indeterminate space he sat, quite motionless, gazing into the warm velvety night and drawing evenly on his brier pipe. The pipe finally went out, unheeded; but presently, preoccupied with his thoughts, he absently filled it from the pouch beside him and felt in his trousers for a match.

And then, all at once—just as he was about to strike the match—he caught his breath sharply, leaned further from the window, and stared fixedly at a spot in the garden, some eighty feet from the house.

His eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness so that he could distinguish, in a vague way, the flower beds and shrubbery; and what he saw there now caused him to slip hurriedly into his coat and, carrying his shoes in his hand, steal swiftly and noiselessly from the house.

Tingling with excitement, his pulse running high, he crept stealthily around the side of the house toward the garden.

He came to a halt behind a flowering hydrangea and, crouching here, fixed his attention upon a person—man or woman, he could not tell—who was digging a pit beneath the grape-arbor.

He could hear the dull ring of the spade as it crunched through dirt and gravel, could see the shapeless figure moving grotesquely in the dark; and then he saw this unknown figure go down on all fours. and he divined that

some object was being buried there—was sure of it when he heard the dirt shoveled back into the hole.

He was completely mystified, however, by the person's subsequent behavior. Dropping to a kneeling posture, the fantastic individual lifted clasped hands to heaven and remained in this suppliant attitude for a matter of several minutes.

When at last the wraithlike form arose, picked up the spade, and moved ghostily off through the shadows of the garden, Barry furtively followed. Maintaining a safe distance between them, he saw the person leave the spade in a shed used for garden tools and implements, then flit hastily across the pasture at the rear of the Caldwell estate.

In this open space, by the pale starlight, he contrived to make out that the fleeing figure wore a full-length cloak with a cowl attached; but he still was unable to ascertain whether he was following a man or a woman.

The chase ended in a small forest about two miles west of the Caldwell home. In the heart of this dense wood the cowled figure entered a crude log-cabin, almost hidden by matted vines and trees and underbrush, and a moment later a light flared at the window.

Cautiously feeling his way through the jungle, fearful lest he make a sound, Barry crept to the window and peered inside—and, involuntarily, he almost exclaimed aloud. The interior of the cabin, a single low room, was scintillant with the light shed by a blazing candelabrum, and the astonishing thing he saw in the room not only filled him with amazement; it answered some questions that had baffled him for hours. Here, at a glance, he saw —or at least began to see—why Tom Caldwell's ancestral home had been violently ransacked last night and Amos Caldwell deliberately murdered.

Turning, he sped back to the Caldwell garden, took the spade from the tool-shed, and, digging up the spot where the cowled form had labored and afterward prayed, unearthed a metal casket somewhat larger than a shoe box. He replaced the earth in the hole, tamped it down with

the spade, carried the spade back to the shed, and took the box to his room.

With the door locked and the shade lowered, he lit his lamp and broke open the casket. It was lined with purple plush and contained (as he expected) the dead body of a Maltese cat.

Holding the animal near the light, he parted its bluish-gray hair and minutely examined the skin; finally, after an arduous search, he found what he sought—a perforation made by a hypodermic needle.

He returned the dead cat to its plush-lined coffin, looked at his watch, and consulted a railroad time-table. It was twenty minutes to four, and a train would leave for Chicago at 4:30. Writing a brief note to Tom (merely saying he'd return on the noon train), he wrapped the casket in an old newspaper, tucked the parcel under his arm, and set off through the dewy morning toward the Glenwood railroad station.

Young Caldwell, patently perturbed, met him at the station upon his midday return to Glenwood.

"What d'you suppose has happened, old man? McCready has caught the burglars! Found them early this morning in a deserted shanty west of town. Recovered the plunder, too. There are two of them, and he's got 'em both in the village jug. But what caused you to leave so precipitately?"

"I wanted an autopsy performed."

"You—*What?*"

"The autopsy proved that Cordelia was killed by cocaine, hypodermically administered."

"But Cordelia's not dead," insisted Tom, plainly puzzled. "She came home this morning. I saw her only an hour ago. Farson showed her to me."

"That wasn't Cordelia you saw—her daughter, maybe, or perhaps a sister, but not Cordelia. I've had Cordelia's body dissected, and I know she died of cocaine poisoning injected by a hypodermic syringe. The poison was injected, by the way, *directly above the heart.*"

Tom shook his head blankly. "I don't get you at all. If Farson doesn't know her own cat . . ."

"Give me twelve hours," said Barry, "and I'll tell you the name of your father's murderer. I'll do even better than that: I will deliver the murderer to McCready."

"But McCready already has the murderer—*both* murderers! He had them locked up, just as I said."

"Have they confessed?"

"Well, no. But they admit they burglarized the house. As for the murder——"

"What do they say about that?"

"They seemed dumbfounded when McCready charged them with it. They still pretend they know nothing about it. Of course they're lying."

"On the contrary," said Barry, "they are probably telling the truth."

"Perhaps, when you have questioned them——"

"But I shan't question them. In the first place," explained Barry, as Tom started to protest, "they can tell me nothing new, since I already know why they entered the house and what they were looking for; and, secondly, I've something else to do this afternoon, vastly more important. Where can I get a good saddle-horse?"

"Why—Floyd Mitchell's livery stable, I guess. I'll show you where it is."

As they started off together, Tom added in a contrite tone:

"Pardon me, old man, for getting so bumptious. But I wish you'd tell me what you have up your sleeve."

"I'd rather not, Tom—just yet. By midnight, however, you will agree with me that this is one of the strangest crimes ever perpetrated."

A little later, astride a roan horse in front of Mitchell's livery stable, Barry leaned down to say:

"I'll probably need you and McCready to-night. There's a schoolhouse at the crossroad, half a mile east of your house. Meet me there soon after dusk, and bring McCready. Meanwhile," he suggested, "you might let it be-

come known at the house, in a casual way, that I've returned to Chicago and am not coming back."

Then, with a wave of his hand, he was off. He turned to the left at the next street intersection and galloped away in a westerly direction; and Tom, watching him till he vanished from sight, walked slowly back to the police station, where Chief McCready, smoking one of his nickel cigars, sat on a stool before the bars of a cell, patiently questioning his prisoners.

The latter, booked under the names of Fred Keefer and Joe Lutkin, maintained a stubborn silence. Tom, in contrast to his prior excitement, now took slight interest in the interrogation. He had no idea what Barry had discovered, or what his discovery meant, but he had known his friend too long—had too often observed, with envious admiration, his astonishing faculty for solving mysterious riddles—to doubt his ability in the present instance. And he was convinced that McCready was wasting his time in trying to get a confession of murder.

Something Barry had said, however, suddenly recurred to him, and, on an impulse, he shot a question at the unkempt men behind the steel bars:

"What were you fellows really looking for in my father's house?"

Instantly the demeanor of the two housebreakers underwent a violent and startling change. The one known as Keefer half rose from the bunk on which he was sitting, his face denoting sudden alarm; while his companion, involuntarily, muttered a savage oath. Both were palpably frightened by the query.

"We was searchin'—" began Lutkin; but Keefer harshly silenced him, then sullenly addressed himself to Tom:

"Go find it yerself!" he growled.

Further questioning, however threatening or adroit, could not persuade either to speak again.

At twilight, Tom and McCready were waiting at the school-house; and with the approach of night they were joined by Barry, who appeared unexpectedly from a field at the roadside. He was covered with dust, his shirt and

collar were blood-stained, and across his right cheek there extended diagonally a jagged cut, red with blood. His chin had been slashed in similar fashion, and his hands were bleeding freely.

He vouchsafed no word of explanation, and Tom knew the futility of asking for one—knew that he, in his own good time, would explain everything. McCready, however, being unacquainted with the young sales-manager-detective, promptly exclaimed:

"Good gosh A'mighty! What's happened to you? Been fightin' with a buzz-saw?"

"Never mind about me," said Barry, crisply. "We've something more important to think about. I want you men to follow me, do exactly as I say, and ask no questions. It is essential that we use the utmost caution. If we are not extremely careful, the Caldwell home will be the scene of another murder to-night.

"I told Mr. Caldwell to-day," he continued, addressing McCready, who had tried to interrupt, "that the crime committed in his father's house, night before last, was one of the most singular in criminal history. The strange things you are going to see to-night will substantiate the statement. Now, then, if you two are willing to trust me——"

"We're with you," said McCready. "Just tell us what to do."

"Follow me," said Barry, and led them through the thickening dusk to the field from which he had emerged, athwart this field, thence into a woodlot, and finally to the pasture of the Caldwell estate.

He halted behind a lilac hedge, which divided the pasture from the garden, and bent his gaze upon the vague outline of the Caldwell stable. A pale light flickered at a small upper window.

"Wait here," he whispered, and, bending forward, crept toward the garden and vanished in the darkness.

In ten minutes he was back.

"It's all right. Come on."

Followed by Tom and McCready, he moved swiftly to the stable, unlatched the door, making no sound, and tip-

toed to a ladder and quickly climbed to the room above, where Otto Grusendorf, the gardener, sat sharpening a scythe-blade by the uncertain light of a smoking lantern.

As Barry sprang into the room, Grusendorf leapt to his feet and shoved back his chair, his broad face purpling with rage.

"Get out o' here!" he roared, and brandished the gleaming blade in his hand. "Get out, before I——" He saw McCready climbing through the opening in the floor and, suddenly stricken with fear, lowered the weapon and whimpered: "I ain't done nawthin', Chief. As God is my witness, I ain't——"

"Chief McCready," ordered Barry, in a voice of stern authority, "take this man in charge. Remove him to the hayloft. If he utters a sound, silence him with your revolver. Make him understand that his life depends on his remaining absolutely still."

He saw that his words had the desired result; then he said to young Caldwell, in a lower tone:

"Into the hay with them, Tom. You'll know when I need you."

When the three men had crawled through the window which opened into the haymow, Barry extinguished the light, stripped to his underclothing, and stretched his length on Grusendorf's canvas cot.

Lying on his right side, he fixed his eyes on that part of the floor where he knew the trapdoor to be; and, though the darkness was at first impenetrable, it gradually grew less black to his steadfast gaze, until at last he could see, somewhat obscurely, the square opening in the floor.

Wide awake, every nerve taut, he lay there for hours,—or so it seemed,—staring steadily at this hazy spot, before his vigil was rewarded. Then he heard a sound in the stable below; and then, his pulse quickening a bit, he heard somebody stealthily ascending the ladder.

In another moment there rose from the floor, in the spot on which his eyes were riveted, a cowled head. For the better part of a minute the head remained motionless, poised like that of a serpent, silently watching him. Then,

evidently satisfied, the owner of the head climbed the remaining rungs of the ladder and entered the room—a gaunt figure in a full-length cloak—and came toward him with cat-like tread.

Pausing beside the cot, the cowled figure stood looking down at him in a listening attitude. Barry was breathing evenly, audibly, as one who soundly sleeps. From beneath his lowered eyelids he saw the hooded form bend over him, felt fingers fumbling with his undershirt, felt a cold hand on his skin, groping for his heart.

And he seized the hand in a grip of steel and leaped from the cot. There was a brief struggle, a piercing scream, and the cloaked figure sank to the floor.

"All right, Tom! It's all over."

Scrambling through the hayloft window, Tom struck a match and lighted the lantern.

"Great heavens!" He gaped at the person huddled on the floor. *"Farson!"*

Barry took from her unresisting fingers a hypodermic syringe. "Here," he said, handing it to young Caldwell, "is the thing that killed your father. It also killed Cordelia. In another minute it would have killed me."

"But—good Lord!—why? *Why?"*

"Perhaps Mrs. Farson will answer you."

But Mrs. Farson, normally loquacious, now chose to say nothing. Dry-eyed, dumb, she stared stonily at the floor.

"She planned to kill Grusendorf," Barry explained, "because Grusendorf killed Cordelia. She killed your father, in exactly the same way Cordelia was killed, because your father ordered Cordelia's death. Isn't that right, Grusendorf?"

Grusendorf, who had climbed stiffly from the hayloft with Chief McCready, advanced into the circle of yellowish light—a grotesque figure in the eerie glow of the fluttering lantern—and stood blinking at the woman; and gradually, it seemed, his slow intelligence grasped the situation. His gnarled hands opened and closed; his weather-beaten face twitched with growing passion; he licked his dry lips and turned to Barry.

"I talk now!" He leveled a trembling forefinger at the woman. "She done it!" he barked hoarsely, breathing hard. "She killed the marster. When she found 'er cat dead, and learned how the marster made me do it, she got the p'isen away from me and told me to say nawthin', no matter what happened later on. She said she'd kill me if I said a word. So I didn't say nawthin', even when I seen it was her that killed the marster. But *now!*"—his voice, rising, shook with wrath—"I see *now* what she was aimin' to do! She was a-fixin' to p'isen me, anyway! . . ." His rage choked him. Unable to continue, he ground his teeth and shook his fists.

"But what about the burglary?" wondered Chief McCready. "What about them prisoners o' mine?"

"One of your prisoners," said Barry, "the one known as Keefer, is a distant relative of Mrs. Farson. A bad lot, always in trouble. He had asked her for money. She intimated, in a careful way, that her employer had hidden in the lower rooms a large amount of cash. Keefer and his pal, Lutkin, broke into the house, seeking the mythical booty. On the same night she killed Mr. Caldwell. The inference, of course, was that the burglars had killed him——"

"But, man alive!" exploded Tom. "She did all this for a *cat?*"

"Her passion for cats," said Barry, "is more extraordinary than you suppose. In fact, it's more than a passion—it's a mania. She worships the animal, somewhat as the ancient Egyptians did. Keeps twenty or more of them in a cabin. They seem to guard her secret possessions. At any rate, I visited her cabin this afternoon, and while examining her diary—which I found under the floor, and to which, by the way, she confided her plans for vengeance—several of the creatures attacked me——"

"You devil!" shrieked the woman, and sprang tigerishly at his face, her fingers distended, clawing like talons.

Barry caught her wrists and turned to McCready.

"You'd better take her, Chief."

MARJORIE BOWEN

CAMBRIC TEA

THE situation was bizarre; the accurately trained mind of Bevis Holroyd was impressed foremost by this; that the situation was bizarre; he could not guess that the opening of a door would turn it into tragedy.

"I am afraid I can't stay," he had said pleasantly, humouring a sick man; he was too young and had not been long enough completely successful to have a professional manner but a certain balanced tolerance just showed in his attitude to this prostrate creature.

"I've got a good many claims on my time," he added, "and I'm afraid it would be impossible. And it isn't the least necessary, you know. You're quite all right. I'll come back after Christmas if you really think it worth while."

The patient opened one eye; he was lying flat on his back in a deep, wide old-fashioned bed hung with a thick dark, silk lined tapestry; the room was dark for there were thick curtains of the same material drawn half across the windows, rigidly excluding all save a moiety of the pallid winter light; to make his examination Dr. Holroyd had had to snap on the electric light that stood on the bedside table; he thought it a dreary unhealthy room, but had hardly found it worth while to say as much.

The patient opened one eye; the other lid remained fluttering feebly over an immobile orb.

He said in a voice both hoarse and feeble:

"But, doctor, I'm being poisoned."

Professional curiosity and interest masked by genial incredulity instantly quickened the doctor's attention.

"My dear sir," he smiled, "poisoned by this nasty bout of 'flu you mean, I suppose——"

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"No," said the patient, faintly and wearily dropping both lids over his blank eyes, "by my wife."

"That's an ugly sort of fancy for you to get hold of," replied the doctor instantly. "Acute depression—we must see what we can do for you——"

The sick man opened both eyes now; he even slightly raised his head as he replied, not without dignity:

"I fetched you from London, Dr. Holroyd, that you might deal with my case impartially—from the local man there is no hope of that, he is entirely impressed by my wife."

Dr. Holroyd made a movement as if to protest but a trembling sign from the patient made him quickly subsist.

"Please let me speak. *She* will come in soon and I shall have no chance. I sent for you secretly, she knows nothing about that. I had heard you very well spoken of—as an authority on this sort of thing. You made a name over the Pluntre murder case as witness for the Crown."

"I don't specialize in murder," said Dr. Holroyd, but his keen handsome face was alight with interest. "And I don't care much for this kind of case—Sir Harry."

"But you've taken it on," murmured the sick man. "You couldn't abandon me now."

"I'll get you into a nursing home," said the doctor cheerfully, "and there you'll dispel all these ideas."

"And when the nursing home has cured me I'm to come back to my wife for her to begin again?"

Dr. Holroyd bent suddenly and sharply over the sombre bed. With his right hand he deftly turned on the electric lamp and tipped back the coral silk shade so that the bleached acid light fell full over the patient lying on his back on the big fat pillows.

"Look here," said the doctor, "what you say is pretty serious."

And the two men stared at each other, the patient examining his physician as acutely as his physician examined him.

Bevis Holroyd was still a young man with a look of peculiar energy and austere intelligence that heightened by

contrast purely physical dark good looks that many men would have found sufficient passport to success; resolution, dignity and a certain masculine sweetness, serene and strong, different from feminine sweetness, marked his demeanour which was further softened by a quick humour and a sensitive judgment.

The patient, on the other hand, was a man of well past middle age, light, flabby and obese with a flaccid, fallen look about his large face which was blurred and dimmed by the colours of ill health, being one pasty livid hue that threw into unpleasant relief the grey speckled red of his scant hair.

Altogether an unpleasing man, but of a certain fame and importance that had induced the rising young doctor to come at once when hastily summoned to Strangeways Manor House; a man of a fine, renowned family, a man of repute as a scholar, an essayist who had once been a politician who was rather above politics; a man whom Dr. Holroyd only knew vaguely by reputation, but who seemed to him symbolical of all that was staid, respectable and stolid.

And this man blinked up at him and whimpered:

"My wife is poisoning me."

Dr. Holroyd sat back and snapped off the electric light.

"What makes you think so?" he asked sharply.

"To tell you that," came the laboured voice of the sick man, "I should have to tell you my story."

"Well, if you want me to take this up——"

"I sent for you to do that, doctor."

"Well, how do you think you are being poisoned?"

"Arsenic, of course."

"Oh? And how administered?"

Again the patient looked up with one eye seeming too fatigued to open the other.

"Cambric tea," he replied.

And Dr. Holroyd echoed:

"Cambric tea!" with a soft amazement and interest.

Cambric tea had been used as the medium for arsenic in the Pluntre case and the expression had become famous

it was Bevis Holroyd who had discovered the doses in the cambric tea and who had put his finger on this pale beverage as the means of murder.

"Very possibly," continued Sir Harry, "the Pluntre case made her think of it."

"For God's sake, don't," said Dr. Holroyd; for in that hideous affair the murderer had been a woman and to see a woman on trial for her life, to see a woman sentenced to death was not an experience he wished to repeat.

"Lady Strangeways," continued the sick man, "is much younger than I—I over persuaded her to marry me, she was at the time very much attracted by a man of her own age, but he was in a poor position and she was ambitious."

He paused, wiped his quivering lips on a silk handkerchief, and added faintly:

"Lately our marriage has been extremely unhappy. The man she preferred is now prosperous, successful and unmarried—she wishes to dispose of me that she may marry her first choice."

"Have you proof of any of this?"

"Yes. I know she buys arsenic. I know she reads books on poisons. I know she is eating her heart out for this other man."

"Forgive me, Sir Harry," replied the doctor, "but have you no near friend nor relation to whom you can confide your—suspicions?"

"No one," said the sick man impatiently. "I have lately come from the East and am out of touch with people. Besides I want a doctor, a doctor with skill in this sort of thing. I thought from the first of the Pluntre case and of you."

Bevis Holroyd sat back quietly; it was then that he thought of the situation as bizarre; the queerness of the whole thing was vividly before him, like a twisted figure on a gem—a carving at once writhing and immobile.

"Perhaps," continued Sir Harry wearily, "you are married, doctor?"

"No." Dr. Holroyd slightly smiled; his story was something like the sick man's story but taken from another angle; when he was very poor and unknown he had loved a girl who had preferred a wealthy man; she had gone out to India, ten years ago, and he had never seen her since; he remembered this, with sharp distinctness, and in the same breath he remembered that he still loved this girl; it was, after all, a commonplace story.

Then his mind swung to the severe professional aspect of the case; he had thought that his patient, an unhealthy type of man, was struggling with a bad attack of influenza and the resultant depression and weakness, but then he had never thought, of course, of poison, nor looked nor tested for poison.

The man might be lunatic, he might be deceived, he might be speaking the truth; the fact that he was a mean, unpleasant beast ought not to weigh in the matter; Dr. Holroyd had some enjoyable Christmas holidays in prospect and now he was beginning to feel that he ought to give these up to stay and investigate this case; for he could readily see that it was one in which the local doctor would be quite useless.

"You must have a nurse," he said, rising.

But the sick man shook his head.

"I don't wish to expose my wife more than need be," he grumbled. "Can't you manage the affair yourself?"

As this was the first hint of decent feeling he had shown, Bevis Holroyd forgave him his brusque rudeness.

"Well, I'll stay the night anyhow," he conceded.

And then the situation changed, with the opening of a door, from the bizarre to the tragic.

This door opened in the far end of the room and admitted a bloom of bluish winter light from some uncurtained, high windowed corridor; the chill impression was as if invisible snow had entered the shaded, dun, close apartment.

And against this background appeared a woman in a smoke coloured dress with some long lace about the shoulders and a high comb; she held a little tray carry-

ing jugs and a glass of crystal in which the cold light splintered.

Dr. Holroyd stood in his usual attitude of attentive courtesy, and then, as the patient, feebly twisting his gross head from the fat pillow, said:

"My wife—doctor—" he recognized in Lady Strangeways the girl to whom he had once been engaged in marriage, the woman he still loved.

"This is Doctor Holroyd," added Sir Harry. "Is that cambric tea you have there?"

She inclined her head to the stranger by her husband's bed as if she had never seen him before, and he, taking his cue, and for many other reasons, was silent.

"Yes, this is your cambric tea," she said to her husband. "You like it just now, don't you? How do you find Sir Harry, Dr. Holroyd?"

There were two jugs on the tray; one of crystal half full of cold milk, and one of white porcelain full of hot water; Lady Strangeways proceeded to mix these fluids in equal proportions and gave the resultant drink to her husband, helping him first to sit up in bed.

"I think that Sir Harry has a nasty turn of influenza," answered the doctor mechanically. "He wants me to stay. I've promised till the morning, anyhow."

"That will be a pleasure and a relief," said Lady Strangeways gravely. "My husband has been ill some time and seems so much worse than he need—for influenza."

The patient, feebly sipping his cambric tea, grinned queerly at the doctor.

"So much worse—you see, doctor!" he muttered.

"It is good of you to stay," continued Lady Strangeways equally. "I will see about your room, you must be as comfortable as possible."

She left as she had come, a shadow coloured figure recreating to a chill light.

The sick man held up his glass as if he gave a toast.

"You see! Cambric tea!"

And Bevis Holroyd was thinking: does she not want to know me? Does he know what we once were to each

other? How comes she to be married to this man—her husband's name was Custiss—and the horror of the situation shook the calm that was his both from character and training; he went to the window and looked out on the bleached park; light, slow snow was falling, a dreary dance over the frozen grass and before the grey copses that paled, one behind the other to the distance shrouded in colourless mist.

The thin voice of Harry Strangeways recalled him to the bed.

"Would you like to take a look at this, doctor?" He held out the half drunk glass of milk and water.

"I've no means of making a test here," said Dr. Holroyd, troubled. "I brought a few things, nothing like that."

"You are not so far from Harley Street," said Sir Harry. "My car can fetch everything you want by this afternoon—or perhaps you would like to go yourself?"

"Yes," replied Bevis Holroyd sternly. "I would rather go myself."

His trained mind had been rapidly covering the main aspects of his problem and he had instantly seen that it was better for Lady Strangeways to have this case in his hands. He was sure there was some hideous, fantastic hallucination on the part of Sir Harry, but it was better for Lady Strangeways to leave the matter in the hands of one who was friendly towards her. He rapidly found and washed a medicine bottle from among the sick room paraphernalia and poured it full of the cambric tea, casting away the remainder.

"Why did you drink any?" he asked sharply.

"I don't want her to think that I guess," whispered Sir Harry. "Do you know, doctor, I have a lot of her love letters—written by——"

Dr. Holroyd cut him short.

"I couldn't listen to this sort of thing behind Lady Strangeways's back," he said quickly. "That is between you and her. My job is to get you well. I'll try and do that."

And he considered, with a faint disgust, how repulsive

this man looked sitting up with pendant jowl and drooping cheeks and discoloured, pouchy eyes sunk in pads of unhealthy flesh and above the spiky crown of Judas coloured hair.

Perhaps a woman, chained to this man, living with him, blocked and thwarted by him, might be wrought upon to——

Dr. Holroyd shuddered inwardly and refused to continue his reflection.

As he was leaving the gaunt sombre house about which there was something definitely blank and unfriendly, a shrine in which the sacred flames had flickered out so long ago that the lamps were blank and cold, he met Lady Strangeways.

She was in the wide entrance hall standing by the wood fire that but faintly dispersed the gloom of the winter morning and left untouched the shadows in the rafters of the open roof.

Now he would not, whether she wished or no, deny her; he stopped before her, blocking out her poor remnant of light.

"Mollie," he said gently, "I don't quite understand—you married a man named Custiss in India."

"Yes. Harry had to take this name when he inherited this place. We've been home three years from the East, but lived so quietly here that I don't suppose anyone has heard of us."

She stood between him and the firelight, a shadow among shadows; she was much changed; in her thinness and pallor, in her restless eyes and nervous mouth he could read signs of discontent, even of unhappiness.

"I never heard of you," said Dr. Holroyd truthfully. "I didn't want to. I liked to keep my dreams."

Her hair was yet the lovely cedar wood hue, silver, soft and gracious; her figure had those fluid lines of grace that he believed he had never seen equalled.

"Tell me," she added abruptly, "what is the matter with my husband? He has been ailing like this for a year or so."

With a horrid lurch of his heart that was usually so steady, Dr. Holroyd remembered the bottle of milk and water in his pocket.

"Why do you give him that cambric tea?" he counter questioned.

"He will have it—he insists that I make it for him——"

"Mollie," said Dr. Holroyd quickly, "you decided against me, ten years ago, but that is no reason why we should not be friends now—tell me, frankly, are you happy with this man?"

"You have seen him," she replied slowly. "He seemed different ten years ago. I honestly was attracted by his scholarship and his learning as well as—other things."

Bevis Holroyd needed to ask no more; she was wretched, imprisoned in a mistake as a fly in amber; and those love letters? Was there another man?

As he stood silent, with a dark reflective look on her weary brooding face, she spoke again:

"You are staying?"

"Oh yes," he said, he was staying, there was nothing else for him to do.

"It is Christmas week," she reminded him wistfully. "It will be very dull, perhaps painful, for you."

"I think I ought to stay."

Sir Harry's car was announced; Bevis Holroyd, gliding over frozen roads to London, was absorbed with this sudden problem that, like a mountain out of a plain, had suddenly risen to confront him out of his level life.

The sight of Mollie (he could not think of her by that sick man's name) had roused in him tender memories and poignant emotions and the position in which he found her and his own juxtaposition to her and her husband had the same devastating effect on him as a mine sprung beneath the feet of an unwary traveller.

London was deep in the whirl of a snow storm and the light that penetrated over the grey roof tops to the ugly slip of a laboratory at the back of his consulting rooms was chill and forbidding.

Bevis Holroyd put the bottle of milk on a marble slab

and sat back in the easy chair watching that dreary chase of snow flakes across the dingy London pane.

He was thinking of past springs, of violets long dead, of roses long since dust, of hours that had slipped away like lengths of golden silk rolled up, of the long ago when he had loved Mollie and Mollie had seemed to love him; then he thought of that man in the big bed who had said:

"My wife is poisoning me."

Late that afternoon Dr. Holroyd with his suit case and a professional bag, returned to Strangeways Manor House in Sir Harry's car; the bottle of cambric tea had gone to a friend, a noted analyst; somehow Doctor Holroyd had not felt able to do this task himself; he was very fortunate, he felt, in securing this old solitary and his promise to do the work before Christmas.

As he arrived at Strangeways Manor House which stood isolated and well away from a public high road where a lonely spur of the weald of Kent drove into the Sussex marshes, it was in a blizzard of snow that effaced the landscape and gave the murky outlines of the house an air of unreality, and Bevis Holroyd experienced that sensation he had so often heard of and read about, but which so far his cool mind had dismissed as a fiction.

He did really feel as if he was in an evil dream; as the snow changed the values of the scene, altering distances and shapes, so this meeting with Mollie, under these circumstances, had suddenly changed the life of Bevis Holroyd.

He had so resolutely and so definitely put this woman out of his life and mind, deliberately refusing to make enquiries about her, letting all knowledge of her cease with the letter in which she had written from India and announced her marriage.

And now, after ten years, she had crossed his path in this ghastly manner, as a woman her husband accused of attempted murder.

The sick man's words of a former lover disturbed him profoundly; was it himself who was referred to? Yet the love letters must be from another man for he had not

corresponded with Mollie since her marriage, not for ten years.

He had never felt any bitterness towards Mollie for her desertion of a poor, struggling doctor, and he had always believed in the integral nobility of her character under the timidity of conventionality; but the fact remained that she had played him false—what if that *had* been "the little rift within the lute" that had now indeed silenced the music!

With a sense of bitter depression he entered the gloomy old house; how different was this from the pleasant ordinary Christmas he had been rather looking forward to, the jolly homely atmosphere of good fare, dancing, and friends!

When he had telephoned to these friends excusing himself his regret had been genuine and the cordial "bad luck!" had had a poignant echo in his own heart; bad luck indeed, bad luck——

She was waiting for him in the hall that a pale young man was decorating with boughs of prickly stiff holly that stuck stiffly behind the dark heavy pictures.

He was introduced as the secretary and said gloomily:

"Sir Harry wished everything to go on as usual, though I am afraid he is very ill indeed."

Yes, the patient had been seized by another violent attack of illness during Dr. Holroyd's absence; the young man went at once upstairs and found Sir Harry in a deep sleep and a rather nervous local doctor in attendance.

An exhaustive discussion of the case with this doctor threw no light on anything, and Dr. Holroyd, leaving in charge an extremely sensible looking housekeeper who was Sir Harry's preferred nurse, returned, worried and irritated, to the hall where Lady Strangeways now sat alone before the big fire.

She offered him a belated but fresh cup of tea.

"Why did you come?" she asked as if she roused herself from deep reverie.

"Why? Because your husband sent for me."

"He says you offered to come; he has told everyone in the house that."

"But I never heard of the man before to-day."

"You had heard of me. He seems to think that you came here to help me."

"He cannot be saying that," returned Dr. Holroyd sternly, and he wondered desperately if Mollie was lying, if she had invented this to drive him out of the house.

"Do you want me here?" he demanded.

"I don't know," she replied dully and confirmed his suspicions; probably there was another man and she wished him out of the way; but he could not go, out of pity towards her he could not go.

"Does he know we once knew each other?" he asked.

"No," she replied faintly, "therefore it seems such a curious chance that he should have sent for you, of all men!"

"It would have been more curious," he responded grimly, "if I had heard that you were here with a sick husband and had thrust myself in to doctor him! Strangeways must be crazy to spread such a tale and if he doesn't know we are old friends it becomes nonsense!"

"I often think that Harry is crazy," said Lady Strangeways wearily; she took a rose silk lined work basket, full of pretty trifles, on her knee, and began winding a skein of rose coloured silk; she looked so frail, so sad, so lifeless that the heart of Bevis Holroyd was torn with bitter pity.

"Now I am here I want to help you," he said earnestly. "I am staying for that, to help you——"

She looked up at him with a wistful appeal in her fair face.

"I'm worried," she said simply. "I've lost some letters I valued very much—I think they have been stolen."

Dr. Holroyd drew back; the love letters; the letters the husband had found, that were causing all his ugly suspicions.

"My poor Mollie!" he exclaimed impulsively. "What sort of a coil have you got yourself into!"

As if this note of pity was unendurable she rose impulsively, scattering the contents of her work basket, dropping the skein of silk and hastened away down the dark hall.

Bevis Holroyd stooped mechanically to pick up the hurled objects and saw among them a small white packet folded, but opened at one end; this packet seemed to have fallen out of a needle case of gold silk.

Bevis Holroyd had pounced on it and thrust it in his pocket just as the pale secretary returned with his thin arms most incongruously full of mistletoe.

"This will be a dreary Christmas for you, Dr. Holroyd," he said with the air of one who forces himself to make conversation. "No doubt you had some pleasant plans in view—we are all so pleased that Lady Strangeways had a friend to come and look after Sir Harry during the holidays."

"Who told you I was a friend?" asked Dr. Holroyd brusquely. "I certainly knew Lady Strangeways before she was married——"

The pale young man cut in crisply:

"Oh, Lady Strangeways told me so herself."

Bevis Holroyd was bewildered; why did she tell the secretary what she did not tell her husband?—both the indiscretion and the reserve seemed equally foolish.

Languidly hanging up his sprays and bunches of mistletoe the pallid young man, whose name was Garth Deane, continued his aimless remarks.

"This is really not a very cheerful house, Dr. Holroyd—I'm interested in Sir Harry's oriental work or I should not remain. Such a very unhappy marriage! I often think," he added regardless of Bevis Holroyd's darkling glance, "that it would be very unpleasant indeed for Lady Strangeways if anything happened to Sir Harry."

"Whatever do you mean, sir?" asked the doctor angrily.

The secretary was not at all discomposed.

"Well, one lives in the house, one has nothing much to do—and one notices."

Perhaps, thought the young man in anguish, the sick

husband had been talking to this creature, perhaps the creature *had* really noticed something.

"I'll go up to my patient," said Bevis Holroyd briefly, not daring to anger one who might be an important witness in this mystery that was at present so unfathomable.

Mr. Deane gave a sickly grin over the lovely pale leaves and berries he was holding.

"I'm afraid he is very bad, doctor."

As Bevis Holroyd left the room he passed Lady Strangeways; she looked blurred, like a pastel drawing that has been shaken; the fingers she kept locked on her bosom; she had flung a silver fur over her shoulders that accentuated her ethereal look of blonde, pearl and amber hues.

"I've come back for my work basket," she said. "Will you go up to my husband? He is ill again——"

"Have you been giving him anything?" asked Dr. Holroyd as quietly as he could.

"Only some cambric tea, he insisted on that."

"Don't give him anything—leave him alone. He is in my charge now, do you understand?"

She gazed up at him with frightened eyes that had been newly washed by tears.

"Why are you so unkind to me?" she quivered.

She looked so ready to fall that he could not resist the temptation to put his hand protectingly on her arm, so that, as she stood in the low doorway leading to the stairs, he appeared to be supporting her drooping weight.

"Have I not said that I am here to help you, Mollie?"

The secretary slipped out from the shadows behind them, his arms still full of winter evergreens.

"There is too much foliage," he smiled, and the smile told that he had seen and heard.

Bevis Holroyd went angrily upstairs; he felt as if an invisible net was being dragged closely round him, something that which, from being a cobweb would become a cable; this air of mystery, of horror in the big house, this sly secretary, these watchful looking servants, the nervous village doctor ready to credit anything, the lovely agitated woman who was the woman he had long so romantically

loved, and the sinister sick man with his diabolic accusations, a man Bevis Holroyd had, from the first moment, hated—all these people in these dark surroundings affected the young man with a miasma of apprehension, gloom and dread.

After a few hours of it he was nearer to losing his nerve than he had ever been; that must be because of Mollie, poor darling Mollie caught into all this nightmare.

And outside the bells were ringing across the snow, practising for Christmas Day; the sound of them was to Bevis Holroyd what the sounds of the real world are when breaking into a sleeper's thick dreams.

The patient sat up in bed, fondling the glass of odious cambric tea.

"Why do you take the stuff?" demanded the doctor angrily.

"She won't let me off, she thrusts it on me," whispered Sir Harry.

Bevis Holroyd noticed, not for the first time since he had come into the fell atmosphere of this dark house that enclosed the piteous figure of the woman he loved, that husband and wife were telling different tales, on one side lay a burden of careful lying.

"Did she——" continued the sick man, "speak to you of her lost letters?"

The young doctor looked at him sternly.

"Why should Lady Strangeways make a confidante of me?" he asked. "Do you know that she was a friend of mine ten years ago before she married you?"

"Was she? How curious! But you met like strangers."

"The light in this room is very dim——"

"Well, never mind about that, whether you knew her or not——" Sir Harry gasped out in a sudden snarl. "The woman is a murderess, and you'll have to bear witness to it—I've got her letters, here under my pillow, and Garth Deane is watching her——"

"Ah, a spy! I'll have no part in this, Sir Harry. You'll call another doctor——"

"No, it's your case, you'll make the best of it—My God, I'm dying, I think——"

He fell back in such a convulsion of pain that Bevis Holroyd forgot everything in administering to him. The rest of that day and all that night the young doctor was shut up with his patient, assisted by the secretary and the housekeeper.

And when, in the pallid light of Christmas Eve morning, he went downstairs to find Lady Strangeways he knew that the sick man was suffering from arsenic poison, that the packet taken from Mollie's work box was arsenic, and it was only an added horror when he was called to the telephone to learn that a stiff dose of the poison had been found in the specimen of cambric tea.

He believed that he could save the husband and thereby the wife also, but he did not think he could close the sick man's mouth; the deadly hatred of Sir Harry was leading up to an accusation of attempted murder; of that he was sure, and there was the man Deane to back him up.

He sent for Mollie, who had not been near her husband all night, and when she came, pale, distracted, huddled in her white fur, he said grimly:

"Look here, Mollie, I promised that I'd help you and I mean to, though it isn't going to be as easy as I thought, but you have got to be frank with me."

"But I have nothing to conceal——"

"The name of the other man——"

"The other man?"

"The man who wrote those letters your husband has under his pillow."

"Oh, Harry has them!" she cried in pain. "That man Deane stole them then! Bevis, they are your letters of the old days that I have always cherished."

"*My* letters!"

"Yes, do you think that there has ever been anyone else?"

"But he says—Mollie, there is a trap or trick here, some one is lying furiously. Your husband is being poisoned."

"Poisoned?"

"By arsenic given in that cambric tea. And he knows it. And he accuses you."

She stared at him in blank incredulity, then she slipped forward in her chair and clutched the big arm.

"Oh, God," she muttered in panic terror. "He always swore that he'd be revenged on me—because he knew that I never cared for him——"

But Bevis Holroyd recoiled; he did not dare listen, he did not dare believe.

"I've warned you," he said, "for the sake of the old days, Mollie——"

A light step behind them and they were aware of the secretary creeping out of the embrowning shadows.

"A cold Christmas," he said, rubbing his hands together. "A really cold, seasonable Christmas. We are almost snowed in—and Sir Harry would like to see you, Dr. Holroyd."

"I have only just left him——"

Bevis Holroyd looked at the despairing figure of the woman, crouching in her chair; he was distracted, overwrought, near to losing his nerve.

"He wants particularly to see you," cringed the secretary.

Mollie looked back at Bevis Holroyd, her lips moved twice in vain before she could say: "Go to him."

The doctor went slowly upstairs and the secretary followed.

Sir Harry was now flat on his back, staring at the dark tapestry curtains of his bed.

"I'm dying," he announced as the doctor bent over him.

"Nonsense. I am not going to allow you to die."

"You won't be able to help yourself. I've brought you here to see me die."

"What do you mean?"

"I've a surprise for you too, a Christmas present. These letters now, these love letters of my wife's—what name do you think is on them?"

"Your mind is giving way, Sir Harry."

"Not at all—come nearer, Deane—the name is Bevis Holroyd."

"Then they are letters ten years old. Letters written before your wife met you."

The sick man grinned with infinite malice.

"Maybe. But there are no dates on them and the envelopes are all destroyed. And I, as a dying man, shall swear to their recent date—I, as a foully murdered man."

"You are wandering in your mind," said Bevis Holroyd quietly. "I refuse to listen to you any further."

"You shall listen to me. I brought you here to listen to me. I've got you. Here's my will, Deane's got that, in which I denounced you both, there are your letters, every one thinks that *she* put you in charge of the case, every one knows that you know all about arsenic in cambric tea through the Pluntre case, and every one will know that I die of arsenic poisoning."

The doctor allowed him to talk himself out; indeed it would have been difficult to check the ferocity of his malicious energy.

The plot was ingenious, the invention of a slightly insane, jealous recluse who hated his wife and hated the man she had never ceased to love; Bevis Holroyd could see the nets very skilfully drawn round him; but the main issue of the mystery remained untouched; who *was* administering the arsenic?

The young man glanced across the sombre bed to the dark figure of the secretary.

"What is your place in all this farrago, Mr. Deane?" he asked sternly.

"I'm Sir Harry's friend," answered the other stubbornly, "and I'll bring witness any time against Lady Strangeways. I've tried to circumvent her——"

"Stop," cried the doctor. "You think that Lady Strangeways is poisoning her husband and that I am her accomplice?"

The sick man, who had been looking with bitter malice from one to another, whispered hoarsely:

"That is what you think, isn't it, Deane?"

"I'll say what I think at the proper time," said the secretary obstinately.

"No doubt you are being well paid for your share in this."

"I've remembered his services in my will," smiled Sir Harry grimly. "You can adjust your differences then, Dr. Holroyd, when I'm dead, *poisoned, murdered.* It will be a pretty story, a nice scandal, you and she in the house together, the letters, the cambric tea!"

An expression of ferocity dominated him, then he made an effort to dominate this and to speak in his usual suave stilted manner.

"You must admit that we shall all have a very Happy Christmas, doctor."

Bevis Holroyd was looking at the secretary, who stood the other side of the bed, cringing, yet somehow in the attitude of a man ready to pounce; Dr. Holroyd wondered if this was the murderer.

"Why," he asked quietly to gain time, "did you hatch this plan to ruin a man you had never seen before?"

"I always hated you," replied the sick man faintly. "Mollie never forgot you, you see, and she never allowed *me* to forget that she never forgot you. And then I found those letters she had cherished."

"You are a very wicked man," said the doctor drily, "but it will all come to nothing, for I am not going to allow you to die."

"You won't be able to help yourself," replied the patient. "I'm dying, I tell you. I shall die on Christmas Day."

He turned his head towards the secretary and added:

"Send my wife up to me."

"No," interrupted Dr. Holroyd strongly. "She shall not come near you again."

Sir Harry Strangeways ignored this.

"Send her up," he repeated.

"I will bring her, sir."

The secretary left, with a movement suggestive of flight, and Bevis Holroyd stood rigid, waiting, thinking,

looking at the ugly man who now had closed his eyes and lay as if insensible. He was certainly very ill, dying perhaps, and he certainly had been poisoned by arsenic given in cambric tea, and, as certainly, a terrible scandal and a terrible danger would threaten with his death; the letters were *not* dated, the marriage was notoriously unhappy, and he, Bevis Holroyd, was associated in every one's mind with a murder case in which this form of poison, given in this manner, had been used.

Drops of moisture stood out on the doctor's forehead; if he could clear himself be sure that it would be very difficult for Mollie to do so; how could even he himself in his soul swear to her innocence!

Of course he must get the woman out of the house at once, he must have another doctor from town, nurses—but could this be done in time; if the patient died on his hands would he not be only bringing witnesses to his own discomfiture? And the right people, his own friends, were difficult to get hold of now, at Christmas time.

He longed to go in search of Mollie—she must at least be got away, but how, without a scandal, without a suspicion?

He longed also to have the matter out with this odious secretary, but he dared not leave his patient.

Lady Strangeways returned with Garth Deane and seated herself, mute, shadowy, with eyes full of panic, on the other side of the sombre bed.

"Is he going to live?" she presently whispered as she watched Bevis Holroyd ministering to her unconscious husband.

"We must see that he does," he answered grimly.

All through that Christmas Eve and the bitter night to the stark dawn when the church bells broke ghastly on their wan senses did they tend the sick man who only came to his senses to grin at them in malice.

Once Bevis Holroyd asked the pallid woman:

"What was that white packet you had in your work box?"

And she replied:

"I never had such a packet."

And he:

"I must believe you."

But he did not send for the other doctors and nurses, he did not dare.

The Christmas bells seemed to rouse the sick man from his deadly swoon.

"You can't save me," he said with indescribable malice. "I shall die and put you both in the dock——"

Mollie Strangeways sank down beside the bed and began to cry, and Garth Deane, who by his master's express desire had been in and out of the room all night, stopped and looked at her with a peculiar expression. Sir Harry looked down at her also.

"Don't cry," he gasped, "this is Christmas Day. We ought all to be happy—bring me my cambric tea—do you hear?"

She rose mechanically and left the room to take in the tray with the fresh milk and water that the housekeeper had placed softly on the table outside the door; for all through the nightmare vigil, the sick man's cry had been for "cambric tea."

As he sat up in bed feebly sipping the vapid and odious drink the tortured woman's nerves slipped her control.

"I can't endure those bells, I wish they would stop those bells!" she cried and ran out of the room.

Bevis Holroyd instantly followed her; and now as suddenly as it had sprung on him, the fell little drama disappeared, fled like a poison cloud out of the compass of his life.

Mollie was leaning against the closed window, her sick head resting against the mullions; through the casement showed, surprisingly, sunlight on the pure snow and blue sky behind the withered trees.

"Listen, Mollie," said the young man resolutely. "I'm sure he'll live if you are careful—you mustn't lose heart——"

The sick room door opened and the secretary slipped out.

He nervously approached the two in the window place.

"I can't stand this any longer," he said through dry lips. "I didn't know he meant to go so far, he is doing it himself, you know; he's got the stuff hidden in his bed, he puts it into the cambric tea, he's willing to die to spite you two, but I can't stand it any longer."

"You've been abetting this!" cried the doctor.

"Not abetting," smiled the secretary wanly. "Just standing by. I found out by chance—and then he forced me to be silent—I had his will, you know, and I've destroyed it."

With this the strange creature glided downstairs.

The doctor sprang at once to Sir Harry's room; the sick man was sitting up in the sombre bed and with a last effort was scattering a grain of powder into the glass of cambric tea.

With a look of baffled horror he saw Bevis Holroyd but the drink had already slipped down his throat; he fell back and hid his face, baulked at the last of his diabolic revenge.

When Bevis Holroyd left the dead man's chamber he found Mollie still leaning in the window; she was free, the sun was shining, it was Christmas Day.

ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

THE HARD-BOILED EGG

WALKING close along the wall, to avoid the creaking floor boards, Philo Gubb, paper-hanger and student of the Rising Sun Detective Agency's Correspondence School of Detecting, tiptoed to the door of the bedroom he shared with the mysterious Mr. Critz. In appearance Mr. Gubb was tall and gaunt, reminding one of a modern Don Quixote or a human flamingo; by nature Mr. Gubb was the gentlest and most simple-minded of men. Now, bending his long, angular body almost double, he placed his eye to a crack in the door panel and stared into the room. Within, just out of the limited area of Mr. Gubb's vision, Roscoe Critz paused in his work and listened carefully. He heard the sharp whistle of Mr. Gubb's breath as it cut against the sharp edge of the crack in the panel, and he knew he was being spied upon. He placed his chubby hands on his knees and smiled at the door, while a red flush of triumph spread over his face.

Through the crack in the door Mr. Gubb could see the top of the washstand beside which Mr. Critz was sitting, but he could not see Mr. Critz. As he stared, however, he saw a plump hand appear and pick up, one by one, the articles lying on the washstand. They were: First, seven or eight half shells of English walnuts; second, a rubber shoe heel out of which a piece had been cut; third, a small rubber ball no larger than a pea; fourth, a paper-bound book; and lastly, a large and glittering brick of yellow gold. As the hand withdrew the golden brick, Mr. Gubb pressed his face closer against the door in his effort to see more, and suddenly the door flew open and Mr. Gubb

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sprawled on his hands and knees on the worn carpet of the bedroom.

"There, now!" said Mr. Critz. "There, now! Serves you right. Hope you hurt chuself!"

Mr. Gubb arose slowly, like a giraffe, and brushed his knees.

"Why?" he asked.

"Snoopin' an' sneakin' like that!" said Mr. Critz crossly. "Scarin' me to fits, a'most. How'd I know who 't was? If you want to come in, why don't you come right in, 'stead of snoopin' an' sneakin' an' fallin' in that way?"

As he talked, Mr. Critz replaced the shells and the rubber heel and the rubber pea and the gold-brick on the washstand. He was a plump little man with a shiny bald head and a white goatee. As he talked, he bent his head down, so that he might look above the glasses of his spectacles; and in spite of his pretended anger he looked like nothing so much as a kindly, benevolent old gentleman —the sort of old gentleman that keeps a small store in a small village and sells writing-paper that smells of soap, and candy sticks out of a glass jar with a glass cover.

"How'd I know but what you was a detective?" he asked, in a gentler tone.

"I am," said Mr. Gubb soberly, seating himself on one of the two beds. "I'm putty near a deteckative, as you might say."

"Ding it all!" said Mr. Critz. "Now I got to go and hunt another room. I can't room with no detective."

"Well, now, Mr. Critz," said Mr. Gubb, "I don't want you should feel that way."

"Knowin' you are a detective makes me all nervous," complained Mr. Critz; "and a man in my business has to have a steady hand, don't he?"

"You ain't told me what your business is," said Mr. Gubb.

"You need n't pretend you don't know," said Mr. Critz. "Any detective that saw that stuff on the washstand would know."

"Well, of course," said Mr. Gubb, "I ain't a full de-

teckative yet. You can't look for me to guess things as quick as a full deteckative would. Of course that brick sort of looks like a gold-brick—"

"It *is* a gold-brick," said Mr. Critz.

"Yes," said Mr. Gubb. "But—I don't mean no offense, Mr. Critz—from the way you look—I sort of thought—well, that it was a gold-brick you'd bought."

Mr. Critz turned very red.

"Well, what if I did buy it?" he said. "That ain't any reason I can't sell it, is it? Just because a man buys eggs once—or twice—ain't any reason he should n't go into the business of egg-selling, is it? Just because I've bought one or two gold-bricks in my day ain't any reason I should n't go to sellin' 'em, is it?"

Mr. Gubb stared at Mr. Critz with unconcealed surprise.

"You ain't,—you ain't a con' man, are you, Mr. Critz?" he asked.

"If I ain't yet, that's no sign I ain't goin' to be," said Mr. Critz firmly. "One man has as good a right to try his hand at it as another, especially when a man has had my experience in it. Mr. Gubb, there ain't hardly a con' game I ain't been conned with. I been confidenced long enough; from now on I'm goin' to confidence other folks. That's what I'm goin' to do; and I won't be bothered by no detective livin' in the same room with me. Detectives and con' men don't mix noways! No, sir!"

"Well, sir!" said Mr. Gubb, "I can see the sense of that. But you don't need to move right away. I don't aim to start in deteckating in earnest for a couple of months yet. I got a couple of jobs of paper-hanging and decorating to finish up, and I can't start in sleuthing until I get my star, anyway. And I don't get my star until I get one more lesson, and learn it, and send in the examination paper, and five dollars extra for the diploma. Then I'm goin' at it as a reg'lar business. It's a good business. Every day there's more crooks—excuse me, I did n't mean to say that."

"That's all right," said Mr. Critz kindly. "Call a spade a spade. If I ain't a crook yet, I hope to be soon."

"I did n't know how you'd feel about it," explained Mr. Gubb. "Tactfulness is strongly advised into the lessons of the Rising Sun Deteckative Agency Correspondence School of Deteckating—"

"Slocum, Ohio?" asked Mr. Critz quickly. "You did n't see the ad. in the 'Hearthstone and Farmside,' did you?"

"Yes, Slocum, Ohio," said Mr. Gubb, "and that is the paper I saw the ad. into; 'Big Money in Deteckating. Be a Sleuth. We can make you the equal of Sherlock Holmes in twelve lessons.' Why?"

"Well, sir," said Mr. Critz, "that's funny. That ad. was right atop of the one I saw, and I studied quite considerable before I could make up my mind whether 't would be best for me to be a detective and go out and get square with the fellers that sold me gold-bricks and things by putting them in jail, or to even things up by sending for this book that was advertised right under the 'Rising Sun Correspondence School.' How come I settled to do as I done was that I had a sort of stock to start with, with a fust-class gold-brick, and some green goods I'd bought; and this book only cost a quatter of a dollar. And she's a hummer for a quatter of a dollar! A hummer!"

He pulled the paper-covered book from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Gubb. The title of the book was "The Complete Con' Man, by the King of the Grafters. Price 25 cents."

"That there book," said Mr. Critz proudly, as if he himself had written it, "tells everything a man need to know to work every con' game there is. Once I get it by heart, I won't be afraid to try any of them. Of course, I got to start in small. I can't hope to pull off a wire-tapping game right at the start, because that has to have a gang. You don't know anybody you could recommend for a gang, do you?"

"Not right offhand," said Mr. Gubb thoughtfully.

"If you was n't goin' into the detective business," said Mr. Critz, "you'd be just the feller for me. You look sort of honest and not as if you was too bright, and that counts a lot. Even in this here simple little shell game, I got to

have a podner. I got to have a podner I can trust, so I can let him look like he was winnin' money off of me. You see," he explained, moving to the washstand, "this shell game is easy enough when you know how. I put three shells down like this, on a stand, and I put the little rubber pea on the stand, and then I take up the three shells like this, two in one hand and one in the other, and I wave 'em around over the pea, and maybe push the pea around a little, and I say, 'Come on! Come on! The hand is quicker than the eye!' And all of a sudden I put the shells down, and you think the pea is under one of them, like that—"

"I don't think the pea is under one of 'em," said Mr. Gubb. "I seen it roll onto the floor."

"It did roll onto the floor that time," said Mr. Critz apologetically. "It most generally does for me, yet. I ain't got it down to perfection yet. This is the way it ought to work—oh, pshaw! there she goes onto the floor again! Went under the bed that time. Here she is! Now, the way she ought to work is—there she goes again!"

"You got to practice that game a lot before you try it onto folks in public, Mr. Critz," said Mr. Gubb seriously.

"Don't I know that?" said Mr. Critz rather impatiently. "Same as you've got to practice snoopin', Mr. Gubb. Maybe you thought I did n't know you was snoopin' after me wherever I went last night."

"Did you?" asked Mr. Gubb, with surprise plainly written on his face.

"I seen you every moment from nine P.M. till eleven!" said Mr. Critz. "I did n't like it, neither."

"I did n't think to annoy you," apologized Mr. Gubb. "I was practicin' Lesson Four. You was n't supposed to know I was there at all."

"Well, I don't like it," said Mr. Critz. " 'T was all right last night, for I did n't have nothin' important on hand, but if I'd been workin' up a con' game, the feller I was after would have thought it mighty strange to see a man follerin' me everywhere like that. If you went about it quiet and unobtrusive, I would n't mind; but if I'd had

a customer on hand and he'd seen you it would make him nervous. He'd think there was a—a crazy man follerin' us."

"I was just practicin'," apologized Mr. Gubb. "It won't be so bad when I get the hang of it. We all got to be beginners sometime."

"I guess so," said Mr. Critz, rearranging the shells and the little rubber pea. "Well, I put the pea down like this, and I dare you to bet which shell she's goin' to be under, and you don't bet, see? So I put the shells down, and you're willin' to bet you see me put the first shell over the pea like this. So you keep your eye on that shell, and I move the shells around like this—"

"She's under the same shell," said Mr. Gubb.

"Well, yes she *is*," said Mr. Critz placidly, "but she had n't ought to be. By rights she ought to sort of ooze out from under whilst I'm movin' the shells around, and I'd ought to sort of catch her in between my fingers and hold her there so you don't see her. Then when you say which shell she's under, she ain't under any shell; she's between my fingers. So when you put down your money I tell you to pick up that shell and there ain't anything under it. And before you can pick up the other shells I pick one up, and let the pea fall on the stand like it had been under that shell all the time. That's the game, only up to now I ain't got the hang of it. She won't ooze out from under, and she won't stick between my fingers, and when she does stick, she won't drop at the right time."

"Except for that, you're got her all right, have you?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"Except for that," said Mr. Critz; "and I'd have that, only my fingers are stubby."

"What was it you thought of having me do if I was n't a deteckative?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"The work you'd have to do would be capping work," said Mr. Critz. "Capper—that's the professional name for it. You'd guess which shell the ball was under—"

"That would be easy, the way you do it now," said Mr. Gubb.

"I told you I'd got to learn it better, did n't I?" asked

Mr. Critz impatiently. "You'd be capper, and you'd guess which shell the pea was under. No matter which you guessed, I'd leave it under that one, so's you'd win, and you'd win ten dollars every time you bet—but not for keeps. That's why I've got to have an honest capper."

"I can see that," said Mr. Gubb; "but what's the use lettin' me win it if I've got to bring it back?"

"That starts the boobs bettin'," said Mr. Critz. "The boobs see how you look to be winnin', and they want to win too. But they don't. When they bet, I win."

"That ain't a square game," said Mr. Gubb seriously, "is it?"

"A crook ain't expected to be square," said Mr. Critz. "It stands to reason, if a crook wants to be a crook, he's got to be crooked, ain't he?"

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Gubb. "I had n't looked at it that way."

"As far as I can see," said Mr. Critz, "the more I know how a detective acts, the better off I'll be when I start in doin' real business. Ain't that so? I guess, till I get the hang of things better, I'll stay right here."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Mr. Critz," said Mr. Gubb with relief. "I like you, and I like your looks, and there's no tellin' who I might get for a roommate next time. I might get some one that was n't honest."

So it was agreed, and Mr. Critz stood over the wash-stand and manipulated the little rubber pea and the three shells, while Mr. Gubb sat on the edge of the bed and studied Lesson Eleven of the "Rising Sun Detective Agency's Correspondence School of Detecting."

When, presently, Mr. Critz learned to work the little pea neatly, he urged Mr. Gubb to take the part of capper, and each time Mr. Gubb won he gave him a five-dollar bill. Then Mr. Gubb posed as a "boob" and Mr. Critz won all the money back again, beaming over his spectacle rims, and chuckling again and again until he burst into a fit of coughing that made him red in the face, and did not cease until he had taken a big drink of water out of the wash-pitcher. Never had he seemed more like a kindly

old gentleman from behind the candy counter of a small village. He hung over the washstand, manipulating the little rubber pea as if fascinated.

"Ain't it curyus how a feller catches onto a thing like that all to once?" he said after a while. "If it had n't been that I was so anxious, I might have fooled with that for weeks and weeks and not got anywheres with it. I do wisht you could be my capper a while anyway, until I could get one."

"I need all my time to study," said Mr. Gubb. "It ain't easy to learn deteckating by mail."

"Pshaw, now!" said Mr. Critz. "I'm real sorry! Maybe if I was to pay you for your time and trouble five dollars a night? How say?"

Mr. Gubb considered. "Well, I dunno!" he said slowly. "I sort of hate to take money for doin' a favor like that."

"Now, there ain't no need to feel that way," said Mr. Critz. "Your time's wuth somethin' to me—it's wuth a lot to me to get the hang of this gold-brick game. Once I get the hang of it, it won't be no trouble for me to sell gold-bricks like this one for all the way from a thousand dollars up. I paid fifteen hundred for this one myself, and got it cheap. That's a good profit, for this brick ain't wuth a cent over one hundred dollars, and I know, for I took it to the bank after I bought it, and that's what they was willin' to pay me for it. So it's easy wuth a few dollars for me to have help whilst I'm learnin'. I can easy afford to pay you a few dollars, and to pay a friend of yours the same."

"Well, now," said Mr. Gubb, "I don't know but what I might as well make a little that way as any other. I got a friend—" He stopped short. "You don't aim to *sell* the gold-brick to him, do you?"

Mr. Critz's eyes opened wide behind their spectacles.

"Land's sakes, no!" he said.

"Well, I got a friend may be willing to help out," said Mr. Gubb. "What'd he have to do?"

"You or him," said Mr. Critz, "would be the 'come-on,' and pretend to buy the brick. And you or him would pre-

tend to help me to sell it. Maybe you better have the brick, because you can look stupid, and the feller that's got the brick has got to look that."

"I can look anyway a'most," said Mr. Gubb with pride.

"Do tell!" said Mr. Critz, and so it was arranged that the first rehearsal of the gold-brick game should take place the next evening, but as Mr. Gubb turned away Mr. Critz deftly slipped something into the student detective's coat pocket.

It was toward noon the next day that Mr. Critz, peering over his spectacles and avoiding as best he could the pails of paste, entered the parlor of the vacant house where Mr. Gubb was at work.

"I just come around," said Mr. Critz, rather reluctantly, "to say you better not say nothing to your friend. I guess that deal's off."

"Pshaw, now!" said Mr. Gubb. "You don't mean so!"

"I don't mean nothing in the way of aspersions, you mind," said Mr. Critz with reluctance, "but I guess we better call it off. Of course, so far as I know, you are all right—"

"I don't know what you're gettin' at," said Mr. Gubb. "Why don't you say it?"

"Well, I been buncoed so often," said Mr. Critz. "Seem's like any one can get money from me any time and any way, and I got to thinkin' it over. I don't know anything about you, do I? And here I am, going to give you a gold-brick that cost me fifteen hundred dollars, and let you go out and wait until I come for it with your friend, and—well, what's to stop you from just goin' away with that brick and never comin' back?"

Mr. Gubb looked at Mr. Critz blankly.

"I've went and told my friend," he said. "He's all ready to start in."

"I hate it, to have to say it," said Mr. Critz, "but when I come to count over them bills I lent you to cap the shell game with, there was a five-dollar one short."

"I know," said Gubb, turning red. "And if you go over there to my coat, you'll find it in my pocket, all ready to

hand back to you. I don't know how I come to keep it in my pocket. Must ha' missed it, when I handed you back the rest."

"Well, I had a notion it was that way," said Mr. Critz kindly. "You look like you was honest, Mr. Gubb. But a thousand-dollar gold-brick, that any bank will pay a hundred dollars for—I got to get out of this way of trustin' everybody—"

Mr. Critz was evidently distressed.

"If 't was anybody else but you," he said with an effort, "I'd make him put up a hundred dollars to cover the cost of a brick like that whilst he had it. There! I've said it, and I guess you're mad!"

"I ain't mad," protested Mr. Gubb, "long as you're goin' to pay me and Pete, and it's business; I ain't so set against puttin' up what the brick is worth."

Mr. Critz heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"You don't know how good that makes me feel," he said. "I was almost losin' what faith in mankind I had left."

Mr. Gubb ate his frugal evening meals at the Pie Wagon, on Willow Street, just off Main, where, by day, Pie-Wagon Pete dispensed light viands; and Pie-Wagon Pete was the friend he had invited to share Mr. Critz's generosity. The seal of secrecy had been put on Pie-Wagon Pete's lips before Mr. Gubb offered him the opportunity to accept or decline; and when Mr. Gubb stopped for his evening meal, Pie-Wagon Pete—now off duty—was waiting for him. The story of Mr. Critz and his amateur con' business had amused Pie-Wagon Pete. He could hardly believe such utter innocence existed. Perhaps he did not believe it existed, for he had come from the city, and he had had shady companions before he landed in Riverbank. He was a sharp-eyed, red-headed fellow, with a hard fist, and a scar across his face, and when Mr. Gubb had told him of Mr. Critz and his affairs, he had seen an opportunity to shear a country lamb.

"How goes it for to-night, Philo?" he asked Mr. Gubb,

taking the stool next to Mr. Gubb, while the night man drew a cup of coffee.

"Quite well," said Mr. Gubb. "Everything is arranged satisfactory. I'm to be on the old houseboat by the wharf-house on the levee at nine, with *it*." He glanced at the night man's back and lowered his voice. "And Mr. Critz will bring you there."

"Nine, eh?" said Pie-Wagon. "I meet him at your room, do I?"

"You meet him at the Riverbank Hotel at eight-forty-five," said Mr. Gubb. "Like it was the real thing. I'm goin' over to my room now, and give him the money—"

"What money?" asked Pie-Wagon Pete quickly.

"Well, you see," said Mr. Gubb, "he sort of hated to trust the—trust *it* out of his hands without a deposit. It's the only one he has. So I thought I'd put up a hundred dollars. He's all right—"

"Oh, sure!" said Pie-Wagon. "A hundred dollars, eh?"

He looked at Mr. Gubb, who was eating a piece of apple pie hand-to-mouth fashion, and studied him in a new light.

"One hundred dollars, eh?" he repeated thoughtfully. "You give him a hundred-dollar deposit now and he meets you at nine, and me at eight-forty-five, and the train leaves for Chicago at eight-forty-three, halfway between the house-boat and the hotel! Say, Gubby, what does this old guy look like?"

Mr. Gubb, albeit with a tongue unused to description, delineated Mr. Critz as best he could, and as he proceeded, Pie-Wagon Pete became interested.

"Pinkish, and bald? Top of his head like a hard-boiled egg? He ain't got a scar across his face? The dickens he has! Short and plump, and a reg'lar old nice grandpa? Blue eyes? Say, did he have a coughin' spell and choke red in the face? Well, sir, for a brand-new detective, you've done well. Listen, Jim: Gubby's got the Hard-Boiled Egg!"

The night man almost dropped his cup of coffee.

"Go 'way!" he said. "Old Hard-Boiled? Himself?"

"That's right! And caught him with the goods. Say, listen, Gubby!"

For five minutes Pie-Wagon Pete talked, while Mr. Gubb sat with his mouth wide open.

"See?" said Pie-Wagon at last. "And don't you mention me at all. Don't mention no one. Just say to the Chief: 'And havin' trailed him this far, Mr. Whittaker, and arranged to have him took with the goods, it's up to you?' See? And as soon as you say that, have him send a couple of bulls with you, and if they can do it, they'll nab Old Hard-Boiled just as he takes your cash. And Old Sleuth and Sherlock Holmes won't be in it with you when tomorrow mornin's papers come out. Get it?"

Mr. Gubb got it. When he entered his bedroom, Mr. Critz was waiting for him. It was slightly after eight o'clock; perhaps eight-fifteen. Mr. Critz had what appeared to be the gold-brick neatly wrapped in newspaper, and he looked up with his kindly blue eyes. He had been reading the "Complete Con' Man," and had pushed his spectacles up on his forehead as Mr. Gubb entered.

"I done that brick up for you," he said, indicating it with his hand, "so's it would n't glitter whilst you was goin' through the street. If word got passed around there was a gold-brick in town, folks might sort of get suspicious-like. Nice night for goin' out, ain't it? Got a letter from my wife this aft'noon," he chuckled. "She says she hopes I'm doin' well. Sally'd have a fit if she knew what business I was goin' into. Well, time's getting along—"

"I brung the money," said Mr. Gubb, drawing it from his pocket.

"Don't seem hardly necess'ry, does it?" said Mr. Critz mildly. "But I s'pose it's just as well. Thankee, Mister Gubb. I'll just pile into my coat—"

Mr. Gubb had picked up the gold-brick, and now he let it fall. Once more the door flew open, but this time it opened for three stalwart policemen, whose revolvers pointed unwaveringly at Mr. Critz. The plump little man gave one glance, and put up his hands.

"All right, boys, you've got me," he said in quite an-

other voice, and allowed them to seize his arms. He paid no attention to the police, but at Mr. Gubb, who was tearing the wrapper from what proved to be but a common vitrified paving-brick, he looked long and hard.

"Say," said Mr. Critz to Mr. Gubb, "I'm the goat. You stung *me* all right. You worked me to a finish. I thought I knew all of you from Burns down, but you're a new one to me. Who are you, anyway?"

Mr. Gubb looked up.

"Me?" he said with pride. "Why—why—I'm Gubb, the foremost deteckative of Riverbank, Iowa."

ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

PHILO GUBB'S GREATEST CASE

PHILO GUBB, wrapped in his bathrobe, went to the door of the room that was the headquarters of his business of paper-hanging and decorating as well as the office of his detective business, and opened the door a crack. It was still early in the morning, but Mr. Gubb was a modest man, and, lest any one should see him in his scanty attire, he peered through the crack of the door before he stepped hastily into the hall and captured his copy of the "Riverbank Daily Eagle." When he had secured the still damp newspaper, he returned to his cot bed and spread himself out to read comfortably.

It was a hot Iowa morning. Business was so slack that if Mr. Gubb had not taken out his set of eight varieties of false whiskers daily and brushed them carefully, the moths would have been able to devour them at leisure.

P. Gubb opened the "Eagle." The first words that met his eye caused him to sit upright on his cot. At the top of the first column of the first page were the headlines.

MYSTERIOUS DEATH Of HENRY SMITZ

Body Found In Mississippi River By Boatman Early This A.M.

Foul Play Suspected

Mr. Gubb unfolded the paper and read the item under the headlines with the most intense interest. Foul play meant the possibility of an opportunity to put to use

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once more the precepts of the Course of Twelve Lessons, and with them fresh in his mind Detective Gubb was eager to undertake the solution of any mystery that Riverbank could furnish. This was the article:—

Just as we go to press we receive word through Policeman Michael O'Toole that the well-known mussel-dredger and boatman, Samuel Fliggis (Long Sam), while dredging for mussels last night just below the bridge, recovered the body of Henry Smitz, late of this place.

Mr. Smitz had been missing for three days and his wife had been greatly worried. Mr. Brownson, of the Brownson Packing Company, by whom he was employed, admitted that Mr. Smitz had been missing for several days.

The body was found sewed in a sack. Foul play is suspected.

"I should think foul play would be suspected," exclaimed Philo Gubb, "if a man was sewed into a bag and deposited into the Mississippi River until dead."

He propped the paper against the foot of the cot bed and was still reading when some one knocked on his door. He wrapped his bathrobe carefully about him and opened the door. A young woman with tear-dimmed eyes stood in the doorway.

"Mr. P. Gubb?" she asked. "I'm sorry to disturb you so early in the morning, Mr. Gubb, but I could n't sleep all night. I came on a matter of business, as you might say. There's a couple of things I want you to do."

"Paper-hanging or deteckating?" asked P. Gubb.

"Both," said the young woman. "My name is Smitz—Emily Smitz. My husband—"

"I'm aware of the knowledge of your loss, ma'am," said the paper-hanger detective gently.

"Lots of people know of it," said Mrs. Smitz. "I guess everybody knows of it—I told the police to try to find Henry, so it is no secret. And I want you to come up as soon as you get dressed, and paper my bedroom."

Mr. Gubb looked at the young woman as if he thought she had gone insane under the burden of her woe.

"And then I want you to find Henry," she said, "because I've heard you can do so well in the detecting line."

Mr. Gubb suddenly realized that the poor creature did not yet know the full extent of her loss. He gazed down upon her with pity in his bird-like eyes.

"I know you'll think it strange," the young woman went on, "that I should ask you to paper a bedroom first, when my husband is lost; but if he is gone it is because I was a mean, stubborn thing. We never quarreled in our lives, Mr. Gubb, until I picked out the wall-paper for our bedroom, and Henry said parrots and birds-of-paradise and tropical flowers that were as big as umbrellas would look awful on our bedroom wall. So I said he had n't anything but Low Dutch taste, and he got mad. 'All right, have it your own way,' he said, and I went and had Mr. Skaggs put the paper on the wall, and the next day Henry did n't come home at all.

"If I'd thought Henry would take it that way, I'd rather had the wall bare, Mr. Gubb. I've cried and cried, and last night I made up my mind it was all my fault and that when Henry came home he'd find a decent paper on the wall. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Gubb, that when the paper was on the wall it looked worse than it looked in the roll. It looked crazy."

"Yes'm," said Mr. Gubb, "it often does. But, however, there's something you'd ought to know right away about Henry."

The young woman stared wide-eyed at Mr. Gubb for a moment; she turned as white as her shirtwaist.

"Henry is dead!" she cried, and collapsed into Mr. Gubb's long, thin arms.

Mr. Gubb, the inert form of the young woman in his arms, glanced around with a startled gaze. He stood miserably, not knowing what to do, when suddenly he saw Policeman O'Toole coming toward him down the hall. Policeman O'Toole was leading by the arm a man whose wrists bore clanking handcuffs.

"What's this now?" asked the policeman none too gently, as he saw the bathrobed Mr. Gubb holding the fainting woman in his arms.

"I am exceedingly glad you have come," said Mr. Gubb. "The only meaning into it, is that this is Mrs. H. Smitz, widow-lady, fainted onto me against my will and wishes."

"I was only askin'," said Policeman O'Toole politely enough.

"You should n't ask such things until you're asked to ask," said Mr. Gubb.

After looking into Mr. Gubb's room to see that there was no easy means of escape, O'Toole pushed his prisoner into the room and took the limp form of Mrs. Smitz from Mr. Gubb, who entered the room and closed the door.

"I may as well say what I want to say right now," said the handcuffed man as soon as he was alone with Mr. Gubb. "I've heard of Detective Gubb, off and on, many a time, and as soon as I got into this trouble I said, 'Gubb's the man that can get me out if any one can.' My name is Herman Wiggins."

"Glad to meet you," said Mr. Gubb, slipping his long legs into his trousers.

"And I give you my word for what it is worth," continued Mr. Wiggins, "that I'm as innocent of this crime as the babe unborn."

"What crime?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"Why, killing Hen Smitz—what crime did you think?" said Mr. Wiggins. "Do I look like a man that would go and murder a man just because—"

He hesitated and Mr. Gubb, who was slipping his suspenders over his bony shoulders, looked at Mr. Wiggins with keen eyes.

"Well, just because him and me had words in fun," said Mr. Wiggins, "I leave it to you, can't a man say words in fun once in a while?"

"Certainly sure," said Mr. Gubb.

"I guess so," said Mr. Wiggins. "Anybody'd know a man don't mean all he says. When I went and told Hen

Smitz I'd murder him as sure as green apples grow on a tree, I was just fooling. But this fool policeman—"

"Mr. O'Toole?"

"Yes. They gave him this Hen Smitz case to look into, and the first thing he did was to arrest me for murder. Nervy, I call it."

Policeman O'Toole opened the door a crack and peeked in. Seeing Mr. Gubb well along in his dressing operations, he opened the door wider and assisted Mrs. Smitz to a chair. She was still limp, but she was a brave little woman and was trying to control her sobs.

"Through?" O'Toole asked Wiggins. "If you are, come along back to jail."

"Now, don't talk to me in that tone of voice," said Mr. Wiggins angrily. "No, I'm not through. You don't know how to treat a gentleman like a gentleman, and never did."

He turned to Mr. Gubb.

"The long and short of it is this: I'm arrested for the murder of Hen Smitz, and I did n't murder him and I want you to take my case and get me out of jail."

"Ah, stuff!" exclaimed O'Toole. "You murdered him and you know you did. What's the use talkin'?"

Mrs. Smitz leaned forward in her chair.

"Murdered Henry?" she cried. "He never murdered Henry. I murdered him."

"Now, ma'am," said O'Toole politely, "I hate to contradict a lady, but you never murdered him at all. This man here murdered him, and I've got the proof on him."

"I murdered him!" cried Mrs. Smitz again. "I drove him out of his right mind and made him kill himself."

"Nothing of the sort," declared O'Toole. "This man Wiggins murdered him."

"I did not!" exclaimed Mr. Wiggins indignantly. "Some other man did it."

It seemed a deadlock, for each was quite positive. Mr. Gubb looked from one to the other doubtfully.

"All right, take me back to jail," said Mr. Wiggins. "You look up the case, Mr. Gubb; that's all I came here for. Will you do it? Dig into it, hey?"

"I most certainly shall be glad to so do," said Mr. Gubb, "at the regular terms."

O'Toole led his prisoner away.

For a few minutes Mrs. Smitz sat silent, her hands clasped, staring at the floor. Then she looked up into Mr. Gubb's eyes.

"You will work on this case, Mr. Gubb, won't you?" she begged. "I have a little money—I'll give it all to have you do your best. It is cruel—cruel to have that poor man suffer under the charge of murder when I know so well Henry killed himself because I was cross with him. You can prove he killed himself—that it was my fault. You will?"

"The way the deteckative profession operates onto a case," said Mr. Gubb, "is n't to go to work to prove anything particularly especial. It finds a clue or clues and follows them to where they lead to. That I shall be willing to do."

"That is all I could ask," said Mrs. Smitz gratefully.

Arising from her seat with difficulty, she walked tremblingly to the door. Mr. Gubb assisted her down the stairs, and it was not until she was gone that he remembered that she did not know the body of her husband had been found—sewed in a sack and at the bottom of the river. Young husbands have been known to quarrel with their wives over matters as trivial as bedroom wall-paper; they have even been known to leave home for several days at a time when angry; in extreme cases they have even been known to seek death at their own hands; but it is not at all usual for a young husband to leave home for several days and then in cold blood sew himself in a sack and jump into the river. In the first place there are easier ways of terminating one's life; in the second place a man can jump into the river with perfect ease without going to the trouble of sewing himself in a sack; and in the third place it is exceedingly difficult for a man to sew himself into a sack. It is almost impossible.

To sew himself into a sack a man must have no little skill, and he must have a large, roomy sack. He takes, let

us say, a sack-needle, threaded with a good length of twine; he steps into the sack and pulls it up over his head; he then reaches above his head, holding the mouth of the sack together with one hand while he sews with the other hand. In hot anger this would be quite impossible.

Philo Gubb thought of all this as he looked through his disguises, selecting one suitable for the work he had in hand. He had just decided that the most appropriate disguise would be "Number 13, Undertaker," and had picked up the close black wig, and long, drooping mustache, when he had another thought. Given a bag sufficiently loose to permit free motion of the hands and arms, and a man, even in hot anger, might sew himself in. A man, intent on suicidally bagging himself, would sew the mouth of the bag shut and would then cut a slit in the front of the bag large enough to crawl into. He would then crawl into the bag and sew up the slit, which would be immediately in front of his hands. It could be done! Philo Gubb chose from his wardrobe a black frock coat and a silk hat with a wide band of crape. He carefully locked his door and went down to the street.

On a day as hot as this day promised to be, a frock coat and a silk hat could be nothing but distressingly uncomfortable. Between his door and the corner, eight various citizens spoke to Philo Gubb, calling him by name. In fact, Riverbank was as accustomed to seeing P. Gubb in disguise as out of disguise, and while a few children might be interested by the sight of Detective Gubb in disguise, the older citizens thought no more of it, as a rule, than of seeing Banker Jennings appear in a pink shirt one day and a blue striped one the next. No one ever accused Banker Jennings of trying to hide his identity by a change of shirts, and no one imagined that P. Gubb was trying to disguise himself when he put on a disguise. They considered it a mere business custom, just as a butcher tied on a white apron before he went behind his counter.

This was why, instead of wondering who the tall, dark-

garbed stranger might be, Banker Jennings greeted Philo cheerfully.

"Ah, Gubb!" he said. "So you are going to work on this Smitz case, are you? Glad of it, and wish you luck. Hope you place the crime on the right man and get him the full penalty. Let me tell you there's nothing in this rumor of Smitz being short of money. We did lend him money, but we never pressed him for it. We never even asked him for interest. I told him a dozen times he could have as much more from us as he wanted, within reason, whenever he wanted it, and that he could pay me when his invention was on the market."

"No report of news of any such rumor has as yet come to my hearing," said P. Gubb, "but since you mention it, I'll take it for less than it is worth."

"And that's less than nothing," said the banker. "Have you any clue?"

"I'm on my way to find one at the present moment of time," said Mr. Gubb.

"Well, let me give you a pointer," said the banker. "Get a line on Herman Wiggins or some of his crew, understand? Don't say I said a word,—I don't want to be brought into this,—but Smitz was afraid of Wiggins and his crew. He told me so. He said Wiggins had threatened to murder him."

"Mr. Wiggins is at present in the custody of the county jail for killing H. Smitz with intent to murder him," said Mr. Gubb.

"Oh, then—then it's all settled," said the banker. "They've proved it on him. I thought they would. Well, I suppose you've got to do your little bit of detecting just the same. Got to air the camphor out of the false hair, eh?"

The banker waved a cheerful hand at P. Gubb and passed into his banking institution.

Detective Gubb, cordially greeted by his many friends and admirers, passed on down the main street, and by the time he reached the street that led to the river he was followed by a large and growing group in-

tent on the pleasant occupation of watching a detective detect.

As Mr. Gubb walked toward the river, other citizens joined the group, but all kept a respectful distance behind him. When Mr. Gubb reached River Street and his false mustache fell off, the interest of the audience stopped short three paces behind him and stood until he had rescued the mustache and once more placed its wires in his nostrils. Then, when he moved forward again, they too moved forward. Never, perhaps, in the history of crime was a detective favored with a more respectful gallery.

On the edge of the river, Mr. Gubb found Long Sam Fliggis, the mussel dredger, seated on an empty tar-barrel with his own audience ranged before him listening while he told, for the fortieth time, the story of his finding of the body of H. Smitz. As Philo Gubb approached, Long Sam ceased speaking, and his audience and Mr. Gubb's gallery merged into one great circle which respectfully looked and listened while Mr. Gubb questioned the mussel dredger.

"Suicide?" said Long Sam scoffingly. "Why, he wan't no more a suicide than I am right now. He was murdered or wan't nothin'! I've dredged up some suicides in my day, and some of 'em had stones tied to 'em, to make sure they'd sink, and some thought they'd sink without no ballast, but nary one of 'em ever sewed himself into a bag, and I give my word," he said positively, "that Hen Smitz could n't have sewed himself into that burlap bag unless some one done the sewing. Then the feller that did it was an assistant-suicide, and the way I look at it is that an assistant-suicide is jest the same as a murderer."

The crowd murmured approval, but Mr. Gubb held up his hand for silence.

"In certain kinds of burlap bags it is possibly probable a man could sew himself into it," said Mr. Gubb, and the crowd, seeing the logic of the remark, applauded gently but feelingly.

"You ain't seen the way he was sewed up," said Long Sam, "or you would n't talk like that."

"I have n't yet took a look," admitted Mr. Gubb, "but I aim so to do immediately after I find a clue onto which to work up my case. An A-1 deteckative can't set forth to work until he has a clue, that being a rule of the game."

"What kind of a clue was you lookin' for?" asked Long Sam. "What's a clue, anyway?"

"A clue," said P. Gubb, "is almost anything connected with the late lamented, but generally something that nobody but a deteckative would think had anything to do with anything whatsoever. Not infrequently often it is a button."

"Well, I've got no button except them that is sewed onto me," said Long Sam, "but if this here sack-needle will do any good—"

He brought from his pocket the point of a heavy sack-needle and laid it in Philo Gubb's palm. Mr. Gubb looked at it carefully. In the eye of the needle still remained a few inches of twine.

"I cut that off'n the burlap he was sewed up in," volunteered Long Sam, "I thought I'd keep it as a sort of nice little souvenir. I'd like it back again when you don't need it for a clue no more."

"Certainly sure," agreed Mr. Gubb, and he examined the needle carefully.

There are two kinds of sack-needles in general use. In both, the point of the needle is curved to facilitate pushing it into and out of a closely filled sack; in both, the curved portion is somewhat flattened so that the thumb and finger may secure a firm grasp to pull the needle through; but in one style the eye is at the end of the shaft while in the other it is near the point. This needle was like neither; the eye was midway of the shaft; the needle was pointed at each end and the curved portions were not flattened. Mr. Gubb noticed another thing—the twine was not the ordinary loosely twisted hemp twine, but a hard, smooth cotton cord, like carpet warp.

"Thank you," said Mr. Gubb, "and now I will go elsewhere to investigate to a further extent, and it is not

necessarily imperative that everybody should accompany along with me if they don't want to."

But everybody did want to, it seemed. Long Sam and his audience joined Mr. Gubb's gallery and, with a dozen or so newcomers, they followed Mr. Gubb at a decent distance as he walked toward the plant of the Brownson Packing Company, which stood on the riverbank some two blocks away.

It was here Henry Smitz had worked. Six or eight buildings of various sizes, the largest of which stood immediately on the river's edge, together with the "yards" or pens, all enclosed by a high board fence, constituted the plant of the packing company, and as Mr. Gubb appeared at the gate the watchman there stood aside to let him enter.

"Good-morning, Mr. Gubb," he said pleasantly. "I been sort of expecting you. Always right on the job when there's crime being done, ain't you? You'll find Merkel and Brill and Jokosky and the rest of Wiggins's crew in the main building, and I guess they'll tell you just what they told the police. They hate it, but what else can they say? It's the truth."

"What is the truth?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"That Wiggins was dead sore at Hen Smitz," said the watchman. "That Wiggins told Hen he'd do for him if he lost them their jobs like he said he would. That's the truth."

Mr. Gubb—his admiring followers were halted at the gate by the watchman—entered the large building and inquired his way to Mr. Wiggins's department. He found it on the side of the building toward the river and on the ground floor. On one side the vast room led into the refrigerating room of the company; on the other it opened upon a long but narrow dock that ran the width of the building.

Along the outer edge of the dock were tied two barges, and into these barges some of Wiggins's crew were dumping mutton—not legs of mutton but entire sheep, neatly sewed in burlap. The large room was the packing and

shipping room, and the work of Wiggins's crew was that of sewing the slaughtered and refrigerated sheep carcasses in burlap for shipment. Bales of burlap stood against one wall; strands of hemp twine ready for the needle hung from pegs in the wall and the posts that supported the floor above. The contiguity of the refrigerating room gave the room a pleasantly cool atmosphere.

Mr. Gubb glanced sharply around. Here was the burlap, here were needles, here was twine. Yonder was the river into which Hen Smitz had been thrown. He glanced across the narrow dock at the blue river. As his eye returned he noticed one of the men carefully sweeping the dock with a broom—sweeping fragments of glass into the river. As the men in the room watched him curiously, Mr. Gubb picked up a piece of burlap and put it in his pocket, wrapped a strand of twine around his finger and pocketed the twine, examined the needles stuck in improvised needle-holders made by boring gimlet holes in the wall, and then walked to the dock and picked up one of the pieces of glass.

"Clues," he remarked, and gave his attention to the work of questioning the men.

Although manifestly reluctant, they honestly admitted that Wiggins had more than once threatened Hen Smitz—that he hated Hen Smitz with the hatred of a man who has been threatened with the loss of his job. Mr. Gubb learned that Hen Smitz had been the foreman for the entire building—a sort of autocrat with, as Wiggins's crew informed him, an easy job. He had only to see that the crews in the building turned out more work this year than they did last year. " 'Ficiency" had been his motto, they said, and they hated " 'Ficiency."

Mr. Gubb's gallery was awaiting him at the gate, and its members were in a heated discussion as to what Mr. Gubb had been doing. They ceased at once when he appeared and fell in behind him as he walked away from the packing house and toward the undertaking establishment of Mr. Holworthy Bartman, on the main street. Here, joining the curious group already assembled, the gallery

was forced to wait while Mr. Gubb entered. His task was an unpleasant but necessary one. He must visit the little "morgue" at the back of Mr. Bartman's establishment.

The body of poor Hen Smitz had not yet been removed from the bag in which it had been found, and it was to the bag Mr. Gubb gave his closest attention. The bag—in order that the body might be identified—had not been ripped, but had been cut, and not a stitch had been severed. It did not take Mr. Gubb a moment to see that Hen Smitz had not been sewed in a bag at all. He had been sewed in burlap—burlap "yard goods," to use a shopkeeper's term—and it was burlap identical with that used by Mr. Wiggins and his crew. It was no loose bag of burlap—but a close-fitting wrapping of burlap; a cocoon of burlap that had been drawn tight around the body, as burlap is drawn tight around the carcass of sheep for shipment, like a mummy's wrappings.

It would have been utterly impossible for Hen Smitz to have sewed himself into the casing, not only because it bound his arms tight to his sides, but because the burlap was lapped over and sewed from the outside. This, once and for all, ended the suicide theory. The question was: Who was the murderer?

As Philo Gubb turned away from the bier, Undertaker Bartman entered the morgue.

"The crowd outside is getting impatient, Mr. Gubb," he said in his soft, undertakery voice. "It is getting on toward their lunch hour, and they want to crowd into my front office to find out what you've learned. I'm afraid they'll break my plate-glass windows, they're pushing so hard against them. I don't want to hurry you, but if you would go out and tell them Wiggins is the murderer they'll go away. Of course there's no doubt about Wiggins being the murderer, since he has admitted he asked the stockkeeper for the electric-light bulb."

"What bulb?" asked Philo Gubb.

"The electric-light bulb we found sewed inside this burlap when we sliced it open," said Bartman. "Matter of fact, we found it in Hen's hand. O'Toole took it for a clue

and I guess it fixes the murder on Wiggins beyond all doubt. The stock-keeper says Wiggins got it from him."

"And what does Wiggins remark on that subject?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"Not a word," said Bartman. "His lawyer told him not to open his mouth, and he won't. Listen to that crowd out there!"

"I will attend to that crowd right presently," said P. Gubb, sternly. "What I should wish to know now is why Mister Wiggins went and sewed an electric-light bulb in with the corpse for."

"In the first place," said Mr. Bartman, "he did n't sew it in with any corpse, because Hen Smitz was n't a corpse when he was sewed in that burlap, unless Wiggins drowned him first, for Dr. Mortimer says Hen Smitz died of drowning; and in the second place, if you had a live man to sew in burlap, and had to hold him while you sewed him, you'd be liable to sew anything in with him.

"My idea is that Wiggins and some of his crew jumped on Hen Smitz and threw him down, and some of them held him while the others sewed him in. My idea is that Wiggins got that electric-light bulb to replace one that had burned out, and that he met Hen Smitz and had words with him, and they clinched, and Hen Smitz grabbed the bulb, and then the others came, and they sewed him into the burlap and dumped him into the river.

"So all you've got to do is to go out and tell that crowd that Wiggins did it and that you'll let them know who helped him as soon as you find out. And you better do it before they break my windows."

Detective Gubb turned and went out of the morgue. As he left the undertaker's establishment the crowd gave a slight cheer, but Mr. Gubb walked hurriedly toward the jail. He found Policeman O'Toole there and questioned him about the bulb; and O'Toole, proud to be the center of so large and interested a gathering of his fellow citizens, pulled the bulb from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Gubb, while he repeated in more detail the facts given by Mr. Bartman. Mr. Gubb looked at the bulb.

"I presume to suppose," he said, "that Mr. Wiggins asked the stock-keeper for a new bulb to replace one that was burned out?"

"You're right," said O'Toole. "Why?"

"For the reason that this bulb is a burned-out bulb," said Mr. Gubb.

And so it was. The inner surface of the bulb was darkened slightly, and the filament of carbon was severed. O'Toole took the bulb and examined it curiously.

"That's odd, ain't it?" he said.

"It might so seem to the non-deteckative mind," said Mr. Gubb, "but to the deteckative mind, nothing is odd."

"No, no, this ain't so odd, either," said O'Toole, "for whether Hen Smitz grabbed the bulb before Wiggins changed the new one for the old one, or after he changed it, don't make so much difference, when you come to think of it."

"To the deteckative mind," said Mr. Gubb, "it makes the difference that this ain't the bulb you thought it was, and hence consequently it ain't the bulb Mister Wiggins got from the stock-keeper."

Mr. Gubb started away. The crowd followed him. He did not go in search of the original bulb at once. He returned first to his room, where he changed his undertaker disguise for Number Six, that of a blue woolen-shirted laboring-man with a long brown beard. Then he led the way back to the packing house.

Again the crowd was halted at the gate, but again P. Gubb passed inside, and he found the stock-keeper eating his luncheon out of a tin pail. The stock-keeper was perfectly willing to talk.

"It was like this," said the stock-keeper. "We've been working overtime in some departments down here, and Wiggins and his crew had to work overtime the night Hen Smitz was murdered. Hen and Wiggins was at outs, or anyway I heard Hen tell Wiggins he'd better be hunting another job because he wouldn't have this one long, and Wiggins told Hen that if he lost his job he'd murder him—Wiggins would murder Hen, that is. I didn't think

it was much of anything but loose talk at the time. But Hen was working overtime, too. He'd been working nights up in that little room of his on the second floor for quite some time, and this night Wiggins come to me and he says Hen had asked him for a fresh thirty-two-candle-power bulb. So I give it to Wiggins, and then I went home. And, come to find out, Wiggins sewed that bulb up with Hen."

"Perhaps maybe you have sack-needles like this into your stock-room," said P. Gubb, producing the needle Long Sam had given him. The stock-keeper took the needle and examined it carefully.

"Never had any like that," he said.

"Now, if," said Philo Gubb,—"if the bulb that was sewed up into the burlap with Henry Smitz was n't a new bulb, and if Mr. Wiggins had given the new bulb to Henry, and if Henry had changed the new bulb for an old one, where would he have changed it at?"

"Up in his room, where he was always tinkering at that machine of his," said the stock-keeper.

"Could I have the pleasure of taking a look into that there room for a moment of time?" asked Mr. Gubb.

The stock-keeper arose, returned the remnants of his luncheon to his dinner-pail and led the way up the stairs. He opened the door of the room Henry Smitz had used as a work-room, and P. Gubb walked in. The room was in some confusion, but, except in one or two particulars, no more than a workroom is apt to be. A rather cumbrous machine—the invention on which Henry Smitz had been working—stood as the murdered man had left it, all its levers, wheels, arms, and cogs intact. A chair, tipped over, lay on the floor. A roll of burlap stood on a roller by the machine. Looking up, Mr. Gubb saw, on the ceiling, the lighting fixture of the room, and in it was a clean, shining thirty-two-candle-power bulb. Where another similar bulb might have been in the other socket was a plug from which an insulated wire, evidently to furnish power, ran to the small motor connected with the machine on which Henry Smitz had been working.

The stock-keeper was the first to speak.

"Hello!" he said. "Somebody broke that window!" And it was true. Somebody had not only broken the window, but had broken every pane and the sash itself. But Mr. Gubb was not interested in this. He was gazing at the electric bulb and thinking of Part Two, Lesson Six of the Course of Twelve Lessons—"How to Identify by Finger-Prints, with General Remarks on the Bertillon System." He looked about for some means of reaching the bulb above his head. His eye lit on the fallen chair. By placing the chair upright and placing one foot on the frame of Henry Smitz's machine and the other on the chair-back, he could reach the bulb. He righted the chair and stepped onto its seat. He put one foot on the frame of Henry Smitz's machine; very carefully he put the other foot on the top of the chair-back. He reached upward and unscrewed the bulb.

The stock-keeper saw the chair totter. He sprang forward to steady it, but he was too late. Philo Gubb, grasping the air, fell on the broad, level board that formed the middle part of Henry Smitz's machine.

The effect was instantaneous. The cogs and wheels of the machine began to revolve rapidly. Two strong, steel arms flopped down and held Detective Gubb to the table, clamping his arms to his side. The roll of burlap unrolled, and as it unrolled, the loose end was seized and slipped under Mr. Gubb and wrapped around him and drawn taut, bundling him as a sheep's carcass is bundled. An arm reached down and back and forth, with a sewing motion, and passed from Mr. Gubb's head to his feet. As it reached his feet a knife sliced the burlap in which he was wrapped from the burlap on the roll.

And then a most surprising thing happened. As if the board on which he lay had been a catapult, it suddenly and unexpectedly raised Philo Gubb and tossed him through the open window. The stock-keeper heard a muffled scream and then a great splash, but when he ran to the window, the great paper-hanger detective had disappeared in the bosom of the Mississippi.

Like Henry Smitz he had tried to reach the ceiling by standing on the chair-back; like Henry Smitz he had fallen upon the newly invented burlaping and loading machine; like Henry Smitz he had been wrapped and thrown through the window into the river; but, unlike Henry Smitz, he had not been sewn into the burlap, because Philo Gubb had the double-pointed shuttle-action needle in his pocket.

Page Seventeen of Lesson Eleven of the Rising Sun Detective Agency's Correspondence School of Detecting's Course of Twelve Lessons, says:—

In cases of extreme difficulty of solution it is well for the detective to reënact as nearly as possible the probable action of the crime.

Mr. Philo Gubb had done so. He had also proved that a man may be sewn in a sack and drowned in a river without committing willful suicide or being the victim of foul play.

ANTHONY BERKELEY

THE AVENGING CHANCE

When he was able to review it in perspective Roger Sheringham was inclined to think that the Poisoned Chocolates Case, as the papers called it, was perhaps the most perfectly planned murder he had ever encountered. The motive was so obvious, when you knew where to look for it—but you didn't know; the method was so significant, when you had grasped its real essentials—but you didn't grasp them; the traces were so thinly covered, when you had realised what was covering them—but you didn't realize. But for the merest piece of bad luck, which the murderer could not possibly have foreseen, the crime must have been added to the classical list of great mysteries.

This was the story of the case, as Chief Inspector Moresby told it one evening to Roger in the latter's rooms in the Albany a week or so later. Or rather, this is the raw material of Moresby's story as it passed through the crucible of Roger's vivid imagination:

On Friday morning, the fifteenth of November, at half-past ten in the morning, Graham Beresford walked into his Club in Piccadilly, the very exclusive Rainbow Club, and asked for his letters. The porter handed him one and a couple of circulars. Beresford walked over to the fireplace in the big lounge hall to open them.

While he was doing so, a few minutes later, another member entered the Club, a Sir William Anstruther, who lived in rooms just round the corner in Berkeley Street and spent most of his time at The Rainbow. The porter glanced at the clock, as he always did when Sir William entered, and, as always, it was exactly half-past ten to the

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minute. The time was thus definitely fixed by the porter beyond all doubt. There were three letters for Sir William and a small parcel, and he also strolled over to the fireplace, nodding to Beresford but not speaking to him. The two men only knew each other very slightly, and had probably never exchanged more than a dozen words in all.

Having glanced through his letters Sir William opened the parcel and, after a moment, snorted with disgust. Beresford looked at him, and Sir William thrust out a letter which had been enclosed in the parcel, with an uncomplimentary remark upon modern trade methods. Concealing a smile (Sir William's ways were a matter of some amusement to his fellow-members), Beresford read the letter. It was from a big firm of chocolate manufacturers, Mason & Sons, and set forth that they were putting on the market a new brand of liqueur chocolates designed especially to appeal to men; would Sir William do them the honour of accepting the enclosed two-pound box and letting the firm have his candid opinion on them?

"Do they think I'm a blank chorus-girl?" fumed Sir William. "Write 'em testimonials about their blank chocolates, indeed! Blank 'em! I'll complain to the blank Committee. That sort of blank thing can't blank well be allowed here." Sir William, it will be gathered, was a choleric man.

"Well, it's an ill wind so far as I'm concerned," Beresford soothed him. "It's reminded me of something. My wife and I had a box at the Imperial last night and I bet her a box of chocolates to a hundred cigarettes that she wouldn't spot the villain by the end of the second act. She won. I must remember to get them. Have you seen it, by the way—*The Creaking Skull?* Not a bad show."

"Not likely," growled Sir William, unsoothed. "I've got something better to do than sit and watch a lot of fools with phosphorescent paint on their faces shooting off silly pop-guns at each other. Got to get a box of chocolates, did you say? Well, take this blank one. I don't want it."

For a moment Beresford demurred politely and then, most unfortunately for himself, accepted. The money so saved meant nothing to him, for he was a wealthy man; but trouble was always worth saving.

By an extraordinarily lucky chance neither the outer wrapper of the box nor its covering letter were thrown into the fire, and this was the more fortunate in that both men had tossed the envelopes of their letters into the flames. Sir William did, indeed, make a bundle of wrapper, letter and string, but he handed it over to Beresford with the box and the latter simply dropped it inside the fender. This bundle the porter subsequently extracted and, being a man of orderly habits, put it tidily away in the waste-paper basket, whence it was retrieved later by the police. The bundle, it may be said at once, comprised two out of the only three material clues to the murder, the third of course being the chocolates themselves.

Of the three unconscious protagonists in the impending tragedy, Sir William was without doubt the most remarkable. Still a year or two under fifty he looked, with his flaming red face and thick-set figure, a typical country squire of the old school, and both his manners and his language were in accordance with tradition. There were other resemblances too, but always with a difference. The country squires of the old school hunted, and so did Sir William. But the squires only hunted foxes; Sir William was more catholic. Sir William, in short, was no doubt a thoroughly bad baronet. But there was nothing mean about him. His vices, like such virtues as he had, were all on the large scale. And the result, as usual, was that most other men, good or bad, liked him well enough (except a husband here and there, or a father or two) and women openly hung on his husky words.

In comparison with him Beresford was rather an ordinary man, a tall, dark, not unhandsome fellow of two-and-thirty, quiet and reserved; popular in a way but neither inviting nor apparently reciprocating anything beyond a rather grave friendliness. His father had left him a rich man, but idleness did not appeal to him. He

had inherited enough of the parental energy and drive not to allow his money to lie softly in gilt-edged securities and had a finger in a good many business pies, out of sheer love of the game.

Money attracts money. Graham Beresford had inherited it, he made it, and, inevitably, he had married it too. The daughter of a late ship-owner in Liverpool, with not far off half-a-million in her own right. That half-million might have made some poor man incredibly happy for life, but she had chosen to bring it to Beresford, who needed it not at all. But the money was incidental, for he needed her and would have married her just as inevitably (said his friends) if she had not had a farthing.

She was so exactly his type. A tall, rather serious-minded, highly-cultured girl, not so young that her character had not had time to form (she was twenty-five when Beresford married her, three years ago), she was the ideal wife for him. A bit of a Puritan, perhaps, in some ways, but Beresford, whose wild oats though duly sown had been a sparse crop, was ready enough to be a Puritan himself by that time, if she was. To make no bones about it, the Beresfords succeeded in achieving that eighth wonder of the modern world, a happy marriage.

And into the middle of it there dropped, with irretrievable tragedy, the box of chocolates.

Beresford gave them to her after lunch as they sat over their coffee, with some jesting remark about paying his honourable debts, and she opened the box at once. Beresford, who did not believe in spoiling good coffee, refused when she offered them to him and his wife ate the first one alone. As she did so she exclaimed in surprise that the filling seemed exceedingly strong and positively burnt her mouth.

Beresford explained that they were samples of a new brand and then, made curious by what his wife had said, took one too. A burning taste, not intolerable but much too strong to be pleasant, followed the release of the liquid, and the almond flavouring seemed quite exces-

sive. "By Jove," he said, "they are strong. They must be filled with neat alcohol."

"Oh, they wouldn't do that, surely," said his wife, taking another. "But they are very strong. I think I rather like them, though."

Beresford ate another, and disliked it still more. "I don't," he said with decision. "They make my tongue feel quite numb. I shouldn't eat any more of them if I were you. I think there's something wrong with them."

"Well, they're only an experiment, I suppose." she said. "But they do burn. I'm not sure whether I like them or not."

A few minutes later Beresford went out to keep a business appointment in the city. He left her still trying to make up her mind whether she liked them, and still eating them to decide. Beresford remembered that scrap of conversation afterwards very vividly, because it was the last time he saw his wife alive.

That was roughly half-past two. At a quarter to four Beresford arrived at his Club from the City in a taxi, in a state of collapse. He was helped into the building by the driver and the porter, and both described him subsequently as pale to the point of ghastliness, with staring eyes and livid lips, and his skin damp and clammy. His mind seemed unaffected, however, and when they had got him up the steps he was able to walk, with the porter's help, into the lounge.

The porter, thoroughly alarmed, wanted to send for a doctor at once, but Beresford, who was the last man in the world to make a fuss, refused to let him, saying that it must be indigestion and he would be all right in a few minutes. To Sir William Anstruther, however, who was in the lounge at the time, he added after the porter had gone: "Yes, and I believe it was those infernal chocolates you gave me, now I come to think of it. I thought there was something funny about them at the time. I'd better go and find out if my wife—" He broke off abruptly. His body, which had been leaning back limply in his chair, suddenly heaved rigidly upright; his jaws locked together, the livid

lips drawn back in a horrible grin, and his hands clenched on the arms of his chair. At the same time Sir William became aware of an unmistakable smell of bitter almonds.

Believing that the man was dying under his eyes, Sir William raised an alarmed shout for the porter and a doctor. The other occupants of the lounge hurried up, and between them they got the convulsed body of the unconscious man into a more comfortable position. Before the doctor could arrive a telephone message was received at the club from an agitated butler asking if Mr. Beresford was there, and if so would he come home at once as Mrs. Beresford had been taken seriously ill. As a matter of fact she was already dead.

Beresford did not die. He had taken less of the poison than his wife, who after his departure must have eaten at least three more of the chocolates, so that its action in his case was less rapid and the doctor had time to save him. Not that the latter knew then what the poison was. He treated him chiefly for prussic acid poisoning, on the strength of the smell of bitter almonds, but he wasn't sure and threw in one or two other things as well. Anyhow it turned out in the end that he could not have had a fatal dose, and by about eight o'clock that night he was conscious; the next day he was practically convalescent. As for the unfortunate Mrs. Beresford, her doctor arrived too late to save her and she passed away very rapidly in a deep coma.

The police had taken the matter in hand as soon as Mrs. Beresford's death was reported to them and the fact of poison established, and it was only a very short time before things had become narrowed down to the chocolates as the active agent. Sir William was interrogated, the letter and wrapper were recovered from the waste-paper basket, and, even before the sick man was out of danger, a Detective-Inspector was asking for an interview just before closing-time with the manager-director of Mason & Sons. Scotland Yard moves quickly.

It was the police theory at this stage, based on what Sir William and two doctors had been able to tell them,

that by an act of criminal carelessness on the part of one of Mason's employees, an excessive amount of oil of bitter almonds had been included in the filling mixture of the chocolates, for that was what the doctors had decided must be the poisoning ingredient. Oil of bitter almonds is used a good deal, in the cheaper kinds of confectionery, as a flavouring. However, the managing-director quashed this idea at once. Oil of bitter almonds, he asserted, was never used by Mason's.

He had more interesting news still. Having read with undisguised astonishment the covering letter, he at once declared that it was a forgery. No such letter, no such samples had been sent out by the firm at all; a new variety of liqueur-chocolates had never even been mooted. The fatal chocolates were their ordinary brand. Unwrapping and examining one more closely, he called the Inspector's attention to a mark on the underside, which he suggested was the remains of a small hole drilled in the case through which the liquid could have been extracted and the fatal filling inserted, the hole afterwards being stopped up with softened chocolate, a perfectly simple operation.

The Inspector agreed. It was now clear to him that somebody had been trying deliberately to murder Sir William Anstruther.

Scotland Yard doubled its activities. The chocolates were sent for analysis, Sir William was interviewed again, and so was the now conscious Beresford. From the latter the doctor insisted that the news of his wife's death must be kept till the next day, as in his weakened condition the shock might be fatal, so that nothing very helpful was obtained from him.

Nor could Sir William, now thoroughly alarmed, throw any light on the mystery or produce a single person who might have any grounds for trying to kill him. He was living apart from his wife, who was the principal beneficiary in his will, but she was in the south of France, as the French police subsequently confirmed. His estate in Worcestershire, heavily mortgaged, was entailed and went

to a nephew; but as the rent he got for it barely covered the interest on the mortgage, and the nephew was considerably better off than Sir William himself, there was no motive there. The police were at a dead end.

The analysis brought one or two interesting facts to light. Not oil of bitter almonds but nitro-benzine, a kindred substance, chiefly used in the manufacture of aniline dyes, was the poison employed. Each chocolate in the upper layer contained exactly six minims of it, in a mixture of Kirsch and Maraschino. The chocolates in the lower layers were harmless.

As to the other clues, they seemed equally useless. The sheet of Mason's notepaper was identified by Merton's, the printers, as of their work, but there was nothing to show how it had got into the murderer's possession. All that could be said was that, the edges being distinctly yellowed, it must be an old piece. The machine on which the letter had been typed of course could not be traced. From the wrapper, a piece of ordinary brown paper with Sir William's address hand-printed on it in large capitals, there was nothing to be learned at all beyond that the parcel had been posted at the office in Southampton Street between the hours of eight-thirty and nine o'clock on the previous evening.

Only one thing was quite clear. Whoever had coveted Sir William's life had no intention of paying for it with his or her own.

"And now you know as much as we do, Mr. Sheringham," concluded Chief Inspector Moresby; "and if you can say who sent those chocolates to Sir William, you'll know a good deal more."

Roger nodded thoughtfully. "It's a brute of a case. The field of possible suspects is so wide. It might have been anyone. What about feminine jealousy? There's a parallel in the Christina Edmunds case. And Sir William's private life doesn't seem to be immaculate. I daresay there's a good deal of off with the old light-o'-love and on with the new. What about investigations round that idea?"

"Why, that's just what I have been doing, Mr. Sheringham, sir," retorted Chief Inspector Moresby reproachfully. "That was the first thing that came to me. Because if anything does stand out about this business it is that it's a woman's crime. Nobody but a woman would send poisoned chocolates to a man. Another man would never think of it."

"That's a very sound point, Moresby," Roger meditated. "Very sound indeed. And Sir William couldn't help you?"

"Couldn't," said Moresby, not without a trace of resentment, "or wouldn't. I was inclined to believe at first that he might have his suspicions and was shielding some woman. But I don't know. There may be nothing in it."

"On the other hand, there may be quite a lot. As I feel the case at present, that's where the truth lies."

Moresby looked as if a little solid evidence would be more to his liking than any amount of feelings about the case. They ruminated in silence.

"But why in the name of goodness," asked Roger suddenly, "nitro-benzine?"

"There, Mr. Sheringham," Moresby admitted, "you've got me. I never even knew it was so poisonous. And the analyst was surprized too. It's never reckoned among the ordinary poisons. I suppose she used it because it's so easy to get hold of."

"Humph!" Roger did not seem so sure. "It is reminiscent, this case, isn't it? I see another parallel besides Christina Edmunds."

"And that is?"

"Why, Sir William Horwood. You remember that some lunatic sent poisoned chocolates not so long ago to the Commissioner of Police himself. A good crime always gets imitated. One could bear in mind the possibility that this is a copy of the Horwood case."

Moresby brightened. "It's funny you should say that, Mr. Sheringham, because that's the very conclusion I've come to. I've tested every other theory, and so far as I know there's not a soul with an interest in Sir William's death, whether from motives of gain, revenge or what you

like, whom I haven't had to rule quite out of it. In fact, if Sir William isn't shielding someone (and I'm almost sure that he isn't), I've pretty well made up my mind that the person who sent those chocolates was some irresponsible lunatic of a woman, a social or religious fanatic who's probably never even seen him. And if that's the case," Moresby sighed, "a fat chance I have of ever laying hands on her."

"Unless Chance steps in, as it so often does," said Roger brightly, "and helps you. A tremendous lot of cases get solved by a stroke of sheer luck, don't they? *Chance the Avenger.* It would make an excellent film-title. But there's a lot of truth in it. If I were superstitious, which I'm not, I should say it wasn't chance at all, but Providence avenging the victim."

"Well, Mr. Sheringham," said Moresby, who was not superstitious either, "to tell the truth I don't mind what it is, so long as it lets me get my hands on the right person."

If Moresby had paid his visit to Roger Sheringham with any hope of tapping that gentleman's brains, he went away disappointed. Rack them as he might, Roger had been unable to throw any effective light on the affair.

To tell the truth Roger was inclined to agree with the Chief Inspector's conclusion, that the attempt on the life of Sir William Anstruther and the actual murder of the unfortunate Mrs. Beresford must be laid to the account of some irresponsible criminal lunatic, actuated by a religious or social fanaticism. For this reason, although he thought about it a good deal during the next few days, he made no attempt to take the case in hand. It was the sort of affair, necessitating endless enquiries that a private person would have neither the time nor the authority to carry out, which can only be handled by the official police. Roger's interest in it was purely academic.

It was hazard, two chance encounters, which translated this interest from the academic to the personal.

The first was at the Rainbow Club itself. Roger was

lunching there with a member, and inevitably the conversation turned on the recent tragedy. Roger's host was inclined to plume himself on the fact that he had been at school with Beresford and so had a more intimate connection with the affair than his fellow-members. One gathered, indeed, that the connection was a trifle closer even than Sir William's. Roger's host was that kind of man.

"And just as it happened I saw the Beresfords in their box at the Imperial that night. Noticed them before the curtain went up for the first act. I had a stall. I may even have seen them making that fatal bet." Roger's host took on an even more portentous aspect. One gathered that it was by no means improbably due to his presence in the stalls that the disastrous bet was made at all.

As they were talking a man entered the dining-room and walked past their table. Roger's host became abruptly silent. The newcomer threw him a slight nod and passed on. The other leant forward across the table.

"Talk of the devil! That was Beresford himself. First time I've seen him in here since it happened. Poor devil! It knocked him all to pieces, you know. I've never seen a man so devoted to his wife. Did you notice how ghastly he looked?" All this in a hushed, tactful whisper, that would have been far more obvious to the subject of it, had he happened to have been looking their way, than the loudest shouts.

Roger nodded shortly. He had caught a glimpse of Beresford's face and been shocked by it even before he learned his identity. It was haggard and pale and seamed with lines of bitterness, prematurely old. "Hang it all," he now thought, much moved, "Moresby really must make an effort. If the murderer isn't found soon it'll kill that chap too."

He said aloud, somewhat at random and certainly without tact: "He didn't exactly fall on your neck. I thought you two were such bosom friends?"

His host looked uncomfortable. "Oh, well, you must make allowances, just at present," he hedged. "Besides, we weren't *bosom* friends exactly. As a matter of fact he

was a year or two senior to me. Or it might even have been three. We were in different houses, too. And he was on the modern side of course, while I was a classical bird."

"I see," said Roger, quite gravely, realising that his host's actual contact with Beresford at school had been limited.

He left it at that.

The next encounter took place the following morning. Roger was in Bond Street, about to go through the distressing ordeal of buying a new hat. Along the pavement he suddenly saw bearing down on him Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming. Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming was small, exquisite, rich and a widow, and she sat at Roger's feet whenever he gave her the opportunity. But she talked. She talked, in fact, and talked, and talked. And Roger, who rather like talking himself, could not bear it. He tried to dart across the road, but there was no opening in the stream. He was cornered.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming fastened on him gladly. "Oh, Mr. Sheringham! *Just* the person I wanted to see. Mr. Sheringham, *do* tell me. In confidence. Are you taking up this dreadful business of *poor* Joan Beresford's death? Oh, don't—*don't* tell me you're not!" Roger was trying to do so, but she gave him no chance. "It's too dreadful. You must—you simply *must* find out who sent those chocolates to that dreadful Sir William Anstruther. *Are* you going to?"

Roger, the frozen and imbecile grin of civilised intercourse on his face, again tried to get a word in; without result.

"I was horrified when I heard of it—simply horrified. You see, Joan and I were such *very* close friends. Quite intimate. We were at school together.—Did you say anything, Mr. Sheringham?"

Roger, who had allowed a faint groan to escape him, hastily shook his head.

"And the awful thing, the truly *terrible* thing is that Joan brought the whole business on herself. Isn't that *appalling?*"

Roger no longer wanted to escape. "What did you say?" he managed to insert, incredulously.

"I suppose it's what they call tragic irony. Certainly it was tragic enough, and I've never heard anything so terribly ironical. You know about that bet she made with her husband of course, so that he had to get her a box of chocolates, and if he hadn't, Sir William would never have given him the poisoned ones and he'd have eaten them and died himself, and good riddance? Well, Mr. Sheringham—" Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming lowered her voice to a conspirator's whisper and glanced about her in the approved manner. "I've never told anybody else this, but I'm telling you because I know you'll appreciate it. You're interested in irony, aren't you?"

"I adore it," Roger said mechanically. "Yes?"

"Well—*Joan wasn't playing fair!*"

"How do you mean?" Roger asked, bewildered.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming was artlessly pleased with her sensation. "Why, she'd seen the play before. We went together, the very first week it was on. She *knew* who the villain was all the time."

"By Jove!" Roger was as impressed as Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming could have wished. "Chance the Avenger, with a vengeance. We're none of us immune from it."

"Poetic justice, you mean?" twittered Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming, to whom these remarks had been somewhat obscure. "Yes, it was, wasn't it? Though really, the punishment was out of all proportion to the crime. Good gracious, if every woman who cheats over a bet is to be killed for it, where would any of us be?" demanded Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming with unconscious frankness.

"Umph!" said Roger, tactfully.

"But Joan Beresford! That's the extraordinary thing. I should never have thought Joan *would* do a thing like that. She was such a *nice* girl. A little close with money, of course, considering how well-off they were, but that isn't anything. Of course it was only fun, and pulling her husband's leg, but I always used to think Joan was

such a *serious* girl, Mr. Sheringham. I mean, ordinary people don't talk about honour, and truth, and playing the game, and all those things one takes for granted. But Joan did. She was always saying that this wasn't honourable, or that wouldn't be playing the game. Well, she paid herself for not playing the game, poor girl, didn't she? Still, it all goes to show the truth of the old saying, doesn't it?"

"What old saying?" said Roger, hypnotised by this flow.

"Why, that still waters run deep. Joan must have been deep, I'm afraid." Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming sighed. It was evidently a social error to be deep. "I mean, she certainly took me in. She can't have been quite so honourable and truthful as she was always pretending, can she? And I can't help wondering whether a girl who'd deceive her husband in a little thing like that might not —oh, well, I don't want to say anything against poor Joan now she's dead, poor darling, but she can't have been *quite* such a plaster saint after all, can she? I mean," said Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming, in hasty extenuation of these suggestions, "I do think psychology is so *very* interesting, don't you, Mr. Sheringham?"

"Sometimes, very," Roger agreed gravely. "But you mentioned Sir William Anstruther just now. Do you know him, too?"

"I used to," Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming replied, with much airiness. "Horrible man! Always running after some woman or other. And when he's tired of her, just drops her—biff!—like that. At least," added Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming somewhat hastily, "so I've heard."

"And what happens if she refuses to be dropped?"

"Oh, dear, I'm sure I don't know. I suppose you've heard the latest?" Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming hurried on, perhaps a trifle more pink than the delicate aids to nature on her cheeks would have warranted. "He's taken up with that Bryce woman now. You know, the wife of the oil man, or petrol, or whatever he made his money in. It began about three weeks ago. You'd have thought that

dreadful business of being responsible, in a way, for poor Joan Beresford's death would have sobered him up a little, wouldn't you? But not a bit of it; he—"

"I suppose Sir William knew Mrs. Beresford pretty well?" Roger remarked casually.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming stared at him. "Sir William? No, he didn't know Joan at all. I'm sure he didn't. I've never heard her mention him."

Roger shot off on another tack. "What a pity you weren't at the Imperial with the Beresfords that evening. She'd never have made that bet if you had been." Roger looked extremely innocent. "You weren't, I suppose?"

"I?" queried Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming in surprise. "Good gracious, no. I was at the new revue at the Pavilion. Lady Cavelstoke had a box and asked me to join her party."

"Oh, yes. Good show, isn't it? I thought that sketch *The Sempiternal Triangle* very clever. Didn't you?"

"The Sempiternal Triangle?" wavered Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming.

"Yes, in the first half."

"Oh! Then I didn't see it. I got there disgracefully late, I'm afraid. But then," said Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming with pathos, "I always do seem to be late for simply everything."

Once more Roger changed the subject. "By the way, I wonder if you've got a photograph of Mrs. Beresford?" he asked carelessly.

"Of Joan? Yes, I have. Why, Mr. Sheringham?"

"You haven't got one of Sir William too, by any chance?" said Roger, still more carelessly.

The pink on Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming's cheeks deepened half a shade. "I—I think I have. Yes, I'm almost sure I have. But—"

"Would you lend them to me some time?" Roger asked, with a mysterious air, and looked around him with a frown in the approved manner.

"Oh, Mr. Sheringham! Yes, of course I will. You mean

—you mean you *are* going to find out who sent those chocolates to Sir William?"

Roger nodded, and put his finger to his lips. "Yes. You've guessed it. But not a word, Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming. Oh, excuse me, there's a man on that 'bus who wants to speak to me. *Scotland Yard,*" he hissed in an impressive whisper. "Good-bye." He dived for a passing 'bus and clung on with difficulty. With awful stealth he climbed up the steps and took his seat, after an exaggerated scrutiny of the other passengers, beside a perfectly inoffensive man in a bowler-hat. The man in the bowler-hat, who happened to be a clerk in the employment of a builders' merchant, looked at him resentfully: there were plenty of quite empty seats all round them.

Roger bought no new hat that morning.

For probably the first time in her life Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming had given somebody a constructive idea.

Roger made good his opportunity. Getting off the 'bus at the corner of Bond Street and Oxford Street, he hailed a taxi and gave Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming's address. He thought it better to take advantage of her permission at a time when he would not have to pay for it a second time over.

The parlourmaid seemed to think there was nothing odd in his mission, and took him up to the drawing-room at once. A corner of the room was devoted to the silver framed photographs of Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming's friends, and there were many of them. Roger, who had never seen Sir William in the flesh, had to seek the parlourmaid's help. The girl, like her mistress, was inclined to be loquacious, and to prevent either of them getting ideas into their heads which might be better not there, he removed from their frames not one photograph but five, those of Sir William, Mrs. Beresford, Beresford himself, and two strange males who appeared to belong to the Sir William period of Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming's collection. Finally he obtained a likeness of Mrs. Verreker-le-

Flemming herself and added that to his collection. Roger like confusing his trail.

For the rest of the day he was very busy.

His activities would have no doubt seemed to Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming not merely baffling but pointless. He paid a visit to a public library, for instance, and consulted a work of reference, after which he took a taxi and drove to the offices of the Anglo-Eastern Perfumery Company, where he enquired for a certain Mr. Joseph Lea Hardwick and seemed much put out on hearing that no such gentleman was known to the firm and was certainly not employed in any of their numerous branches. Many questions had to be put about the firm and its branches before he consented to abandon the quest. After that he drove to Messrs. Weall & Wilson, the well-known institution which protects the trade interests of individuals and advises its subscribers regarding investments. Here he entered his name as a subscriber, and explaining that he had a large sum of money to invest, filled in one of the special enquiry forms which are headed Strictly Confidential.

Then he went to the Rainbow Club, in Piccadilly.

Introducing himself to the porter without a blush as connected with Scotland Yard, he asked the man a number of questions, more or less trivial, concerning the tragedy. "Sir William, I understand," he said finally, as if by the way, "did not dine here the evening before?"

There it appeared that Roger was wrong. Sir William had dined in the club, as he did about three times a week.

"But I quite understood he wasn't here that evening?" Roger said plaintively.

The porter was emphatic. He remembered quite well. So did a waiter, whom the porter summoned to corroborate him. Sir William had dined, rather late, and had not left the dining-room till about nine o'clock. He spent the evening there too, the waiter knew, or at least some of it, for he himself had taken him a whiskey-and-soda in the lounge not less than half-an-hour later.

Roger retired.

He retired to Merton's, in a taxi.

It seemed that he wanted some new notepaper printed, of a very special kind, and to the young woman behind the counter he specified at great length and in wearisome detail exactly what he did want. The young woman handed him the book of specimen pieces and asked him to see if there was any style there which would suit him. Roger glanced through it, remarking garrulously to the young woman that he had been recommended to Merton's by a very dear friend, whose photograph he happened to have on him at that moment. Wasn't that a curious coincidence? The young woman agreed that it was.

"About a fortnight ago, I think my friend was in here last," said Roger, producing the photograph. "Recognise this?"

The young woman took the photograph, without apparent interest. "Oh, yes. I remember. About some notepaper too, wasn't it? So that's your friend. Well, it's a small world. Now this is a line we're selling a good deal of just now."

Roger went back to his rooms to dine. Afterwards, feeling restless, he wandered out of the Albany and turned down Piccadilly. He wandered round the Circus, thinking hard, and paused for a moment out of habit to inspect the photographs of the new revue hung outside the Pavilion. The next thing he realized was that he had got as far as Jermyn Street and was standing outside the Imperial Theatre. Glancing at the advertisements of *The Creaking Skull* he saw that it began at half-past eight, and his watch told him that the time was twenty-nine minutes past that hour. He had an evening to get through somehow. He went inside.

The next morning, very early for Roger, he called on Moresby at Scotland Yard.

"Morseby," he said without preamble, "I want you to do something for me. Can you find me a taximan who took a fare from Piccadilly Circus or its neighbourhood at about ten past nine on the evening before the Beresford crime, to the Strand somewhere near the bottom of South-

ampton Street, and another who took a fare back between those points. I'm not sure about the first. Or one taxi might have been used for the double journey, but I doubt that. Anyhow, try to find out for me, will you?"

"What are you up to now, Mr. Sheringham?" Moresby asked suspiciously.

"Breaking down an interesting alibi," replied Roger serenely. "By the way, I know who sent those chocolates to Sir William. I'm just building up a nice structure of evidence for you. Ring up my rooms when you've got those taximen."

He strolled out, leaving Moresby positively gaping after him. Roger had his annoying moments.

The rest of the day he spent apparently trying a buy a secondhand typewriter. He was very particular that it should be a Hamilton No. 4. When the shop-people tried to induce him to consider other makes he refused to look at them, saying that he had had the Hamilton No. 4 so strongly recommended to him by a friend, who had bought one about three weeks ago. Perhaps it was at this very shop? No? They hadn't sold a Hamilton No. 4 for the last three months? How odd.

But at one shop they had sold a Hamilton No. 4 within the last month, and that was odder still.

At half-past four Roger got back to his rooms to await the telephone-message from Moresby. At half-past five it came.

"There are fourteen taxi-drivers here, littering up my office," said Moresby offensively. "They all took fares from the Strand to Piccadilly circus at your time. What do you want me to do with 'em, Mr. Sheringham?"

"Keep them till I come, Chief Inspector," returned Roger with dignity, and grabbed his hat.

The interview with the fourteen was brief enough, however. To each grinning man (Roger deduced a little heavy humour on the part of Moresby before his arrival) he showed in turn a photograph, holding it so that Moresby could not see it, and asked if he could recognise his

fare. The ninth man did so, without hesitation. At a nod from Roger Moresby dismissed the others.

"How dressed?" Roger asked the man laconically, tucking the photograph away in his pocket.

"Evening togs," replied the other, equally laconic.

Roger took a note of his name and sent him away with a ten-shilling tip. "The case," he said to Moresby, "is at an end."

Moresby sat at his table and tried to look official. "And now Mr. Sheringham, sir, perhaps you'll tell me what you've been doing."

"Certainly, Moresby: your work for you," Roger said blandly, seating himself on the table and swinging his legs. As he did so, a photograph fell unnoticed out of his pocket and fluttered, face downwards, under the table. Moresby eyed it but did not pick it up. "I really have solved the thing, you know. Here's the evidence for you." He took from his note-case an old letter and handed it to the Chief Inspector. "Look at the slightly crooked s's and the chipped capital H."

Moresby studied it for a moment, then drew the forged letter from a drawer of his table and compared the two minutely. "Where did you get hold of this?" he asked soberly.

"In a secondhand typewriter shop in St. Martin's Lane. The machine was sold to an unknown customer about a month ago. They identified the customer from that same photograph. As it happened, this machine had been used for a time in the office after it was repaired, to see that it was O. K., and I easily got hold of that specimen of its work."

"And where is the machine now?"

"Oh, at the bottom of the Thames, I expect," Roger smiled. "I tell you, this criminal takes no unnecessary chances. But that doesn't matter. There's your evidence."

"Humph! It's all right so far as it goes," conceded Moresby. "But what about Mason's paper?"

"That," said Roger calmly, "was extracted from Merton's book of sample notepapers, as I'd guessed from the

very yellowed edges might be the case. I can prove contact of the criminal with the book, and there is a gap which will certainly turn out to have been filled by that piece of paper."

"That's fine," Moresby said more heartily.

"As for that taximan, the criminal had an alibi. You've heard it broken down. Between ten past nine and twenty-five past, in fact during the time when the parcel must have been posted, the murderer took a hurried journey to that neighborhood, going probably by 'bus or underground, but returning, as I expected, by taxi, because time would be getting short."

"And the murderer, Mr. Sheringham?"

"The person whose photograph is in my pocket," Roger said unkindly. "By the way, do you remember what I was saying the other day about Chance the Avenger, my excellent film-title? Well, it's worked again. By a chance meeting in Bond Street with a silly woman I was put, by the merest accident, in possession of a piece of information which showed me then and there who had sent those chocolates addressed to Sir William. There were other possibilities of course, and I tested them, but then and there on the pavement I saw the whole thing, from first to last."

"Who *was* the murderer, then?" repeated Moresby.

"It was so beautifully planned," Roger went on dreamily. "We were taken in completely. We never grasped for one moment that we were making the fundamental mistake that the murderer all along intended us to make."

In spite of his impatience Moresby obliged. "And what was that?"

"Why, that the plan had miscarried. That the wrong person had been killed. That was just the beauty of it. The plan had *not* miscarried. It had been brilliantly successful. The wrong person was *not* killed. Very much the right person was."

Moresby gaped. "Why, how on earth do you make that out, sir?"

"Mrs. Beresford was the objective all the time. That's why the plot was so ingenious. Everything was anticipated. It was perfectly natural that Sir William should hand the chocolates over to Beresford. It was foreseen that we should look for the criminal among Sir William's associates and not the dead woman's. It was probably even foreseen that the crime would be considered the work of a woman; whereas really, of course, chocolates were employed because it was a woman who was the objective. Brilliant!"

Moresby, unable to wait any longer, snatched up the photograph and gazed at it incredulously. He whistled. "Good heavens! But Mr. Sheringham, you don't mean to tell me that. . . . Sir William himself!"

"He wanted to get rid of Mrs. Beresford," Roger continued, gazing dreamily at his swinging feet. "He'd liked her well enough at the beginning, no doubt, though it was her money he was after all the time. But she must have bored him dreadfully very soon. She was really never his type at all.

"But the real trouble was that she was too close with her money. She sentenced herself to death there. He wanted it, or some of it, pretty badly; and she wouldn't part. There's no doubt about the motive. I made a list of his firms and got a report on them. They're all rocky and need money to save them. He'd got through all his own, and he had to get more. Nobody seems to have gathered it, but he's a rotten business-man. And half-a-million!

"As for the nitro-benzine, that was simple enough. I looked it up and found that besides the uses you told me, it's largely used in perfumery. And he's got a perfumery business. The Anglo-Eastern Perfumery Company. That's how he'd know about it being poisonous of course. But I shouldn't think he got his supply from there. He'd be cleverer than that. He probably made the stuff himself. I know that he has at any rate an elementary knowledge of chemistry (at least, he was on the modern side at Selchester) and it's the simplest operation. Any school-

boy knows how to treat benzol with nitric acid to get nitro-benzine."

"But," stammered Moresby, "but Sir William. . . . He was at Eton."

"Sir William?" said Roger sharply. "Who's talking about Sir William? I told you the photograph of the murderer was in my pocket." He whipped out the photograph in question and confronted the astounded Chief Inspector with it. "Beresford, man! Beresford's the murderer, of his own wife." Roger studied the other's dumbfounded face and smiled secretly. He felt avenged now for the heavy humour with the taximen.

"Beresford," he went on more mildly, "didn't want his wife but did want her money. He contrived this plot, providing, as he thought, against every contingency that could possibly arise. He established a mild alibi, if suspicion ever should arise, by taking his wife to the Imperial, and slipped out of the theatre at the first interval. (I sat through the first act of the dreadful thing myself last night to see when the interval came.) Then he hurried down to the Strand, posted his parcel, and took a taxi back. He had ten minutes, but nobody was going to remark if he got back to the box a minute or two late; you may be able to find that he did.

"And the rest simply followed. He knew Sir William came to the Club every morning at ten-thirty, as regularly as clockwork; he knew that for a psychological certainty he could get the chocolates handed over to him if he hinted for them; he knew that the police would go chasing after all sorts of false trails starting from Sir William. And as for the wrapper and the forged letter, he carefully didn't destroy them because they were calculated not only to divert suspicion but actually to point away from him to some anonymous lunatic. Which is exactly what they did."

"Well, it's very smart of you, Mr. Sheringham," Moresby said, with a little sigh but quite ungrudgingly. "Very smart indeed. By the way, what was it the lady told you in Bond Street?"

"Why, it wasn't so much what she actually told me as what I heard between her words, so to speak. What she told me was that Mrs. Beresford knew the answer to that bet; what I deduced was that, being the sort of person she was, it was quite incredible that Mrs. Beresford should have made a bet to which she knew the answer. *Ergo,* she didn't. *Ergo,* there never was such a bet. *Ergo,* Beresford was lying. *Ergo,* Beresford wanted to get hold of those chocolates for some reason other than he stated. And there was only one other reason.

"After all, we only had Beresford's word for the bet, didn't we? And only his word for the conversation in the drawing-room. Of course he wouldn't have left her till he'd seen her take, or somehow made her take, at least six of the chocolates, more than a lethal dose. That's why the stuff was in those meticulous six-minim doses. And so that he could take a couple himself, of course. A clever stroke, that. Took us all in again. Though of course he exaggerated his symptoms considerably."

Moresby rose to his feet. "Well, Mr. Sheringham, I'm much obliged to you, sir. And now I shall have to get busy myself." He scratched his head. "Chance the Avenger, eh? Well, I can tell you one pretty big thing Beresford left to Chance the Avenger, Mr. Sheringham. Suppose Sir William hadn't handed over the chocolates after all? Supposing he'd kept 'em, to give to one of his own ladies? That was a nasty risk to take."

Roger positively snorted. He felt a personal pride in Beresford by this time, and it distressed him to hear a great man so maligned.

"Really, Moresby! It wouldn't have had any serious results if Sir William had. Do give my man credit for being what he is. You don't imagine he sent the poisoned ones to Sir William, do you? Of course not! He'd send harmless ones, and exchange them for the others on his way home. Dash it all, he wouldn't go right out of his way to present opportunities to Chance.

"If," added Roger, "Chance really is the right word."

BEN AMES WILLIAMS

THE CIGARET

THIS story should properly be dedicated to Tim O'Hearn, since it is the record of the first appearance of that strange talent of his—that gift for seeing beneath the surface of things; that ability to stand in the background like a piece of furniture, so little regarded that men forgot he was there, while he read their minds! Worth some attention, this Tim O'Hearn.

But the tale more properly concerns itself with the affairs of Dr. Ralph Hounder—and the cigaret he smoked and laid aside.

That he should have come into possession of the pistol at all was a stroke of good fortune; he had some inkling of this at the time. He was in the north woods with a guide who was also a game warden; they stopped one day at a squatter's shack in a clearing where once had roared a lumber camp, and Dr. Hounder's guide went indoors to question the squatter.

Dr. Hounder, staying outside, was surprised to see the pistol drop from an open window at his very feet. He picked it up and saw a cheap weapon, .38 caliber, with a barrel from which the nickel had chipped off and a handle of which half had cracked away. He smiled a little, imagining the squatter must have had some reason for wishing to be rid of the thing, and dropped it into his pocket. Later that day the whimsical thought occurred to him that if he ever wished to commit a murder, this would be a useful possession, this nameless pistol from a nameless source. Dr. Hounder knew that murderers had in the past been traced by the weapon they used. He kept

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the pistol; had kept it ever since. He was a bachelor, and there was no woman in his house to discover it and throw it gingerly away. The original cartridges were still in the cylinder. He fired the thing one day, and was interested in the discovery that the report was not loud; was no more than a flat, snapping crack. He kept the pistol locked away in a steel box. His personal and private pharmacopœia was also kept in the box. The pistol was not the doctor's only secret.

The mistake he made would never have been made but for this other secret of his. Some slight difficulty in replenishing his supplies of the drug he desired had left his nerves in an uncertain and jangling state.

Then Dr. David Mills called him in consultation on Mrs. Farraday, and they agreed upon a dosage which—Dr. Mills having departed and the nurse being delayed elsewhere—Dr. Hounder administered. His hand shook a little, in the measuring, and Mrs. Farraday died before morning.

Her death had not been unexpected; the poor lady had been ill for weeks, and she was old and ready to die. Nevertheless it was a shocking thing for Dr. Hounder. As soon as he realized his mistake, he had, of course, taken his precautions; her death might have been expected in the natural course of events without that mistake of his, and there was no reason to suspect him of mistakes. Dr. Hounder, by the time the body was buried and the danger of an examination was past, had decided that he was safe from discovery. And then, three or four days after the obsequies, James Farraday sent for him.

Farraday and his wife were old; they had had no children, and they lived very much alone in a great house surrounded by pleasant hedged grounds, where an old servant or two attended them. Farraday was wealthy; it was understood that his death would profit certain worthy institutions. There was certainly no reason to suppose that it would in any wise profit Dr. Ralph Hounder. This was the strength of his position, as he saw it after his call in response to Mr. Farraday's summons.

That summons itself had startled him; the reason for it was at first even more startling. It appeared Mr. Farraday had conceived the idea that his wife's death need not have occurred. "Not yet at least, Dr. Hounder," he explained. "You understand that I know she was very ill; and she and I are both old—" He amended himself, smiling pitifully. "Were both old," he said, and continued: "But I saw no sign of an approaching crisis in her on the day of her death, and her more serious attacks were usually preceded by indications which I could see. I may say that her death was a shock to me." The old man's feeble eyes filled with tears. "My grief prevented clear thought at first; I have sought to think more clearly. It seems to me possible that Dr. Mills made a mistake in his prescription."

Dr. Hounder heard this with an inaudible sigh of relief; the tension of his nerves and muscles relaxed. He said diplomatically: "It is possible you are right, sir. I am inclined to doubt it. Dr. Mills is very careful. We agreed on the course of treatment, he and I, before he left the house that day. I remained to talk with your wife for a little, a few minutes, until the nurse should return."

"I appreciate all you did, Dr. Hounder," Mr. Farraday assured him. "I have no thought of blaming you."

Dr. Hounder bowed. "That is very generous of you, sir."

"But somebody's to blame," said Mr. Farraday, a little heatedly. "Somebody's to blame. Or maybe no one is. That's what distresses me now, sir. Not knowing whether any one is to be blamed or no."

"When our loved ones leave us," Dr. Hounder suggested, "we are too apt to accuse ourselves, too apt to think we have been remiss, or careless, or have done less than we might. We should not thus distress ourselves." Dr. Hounder's tones were reassuring.

The old man had the stubbornness of age. "You are right, of course," he assented. "I know that I am unreasonable." He smiled placatingly. "Yet I am unreasonable, and determinedly so. I wish to be sure, in this matter, Dr. Hounder. I sent for you to ask a simple thing. Would you

object to my seeking an order to exhume and examine—my wife's body?"

Dr. Hounder found himself replying, in the suave tones long habit had taught him, that he would not object in the least; at the same time a suddenly awakened devil of panic in him was objecting very violently indeed.

Even while he reassured Mr. Farraday, consenting and applauding the wisdom of his plan, his thoughts were bent on that scene by Mrs. Farraday's bedside, scarce a week before. Already the scene was in his mind distorted; even at this short distance he could not be sure what had happened. His nerves had been all awry. The old woman was near death, anyway. Why so much bother? He saw quite clearly that if Mr. Farraday went ahead with this plan of his, it meant ruin for Dr. Ralph Hounder, the fashionable practitioner.

". . . Write the letter," he heard himself saying to Mr. Farraday. "I suggest that you write it tonight, and I will call tomorrow morning and consult with you on its terms—before dispatching it. May I suggest that the matter be kept between us two? In the meantime I will consult with Dr. Mills."

Mr. Farraday objected to that; and Dr. Hounder argued the point automatically, his words not mirroring his thoughts at all. He yielded at last; and at about the same time reached his own decision. When he left Mr. Farraday and turned homeward, he was committed, in his thoughts, to murder. . . .

His plans were laid with scientific accuracy and with artistic simplicity. The ordinary doctor, he told himself, if he decided on murder, would choose a drug. The very use of the pistol was, he felt, a stroke of genius on his part. He sat late that night, considering the project, until there awoke in him a certain zeal for it.

He knew something of the Farraday menage; knew the routine of the great house. It stood at the corner of two intersecting streets, in a neighborhood not much frequented, and the house itself was near the sidewalk. Mr. Farraday was accustomed to receive callers in his big

living-room on the ground floor; he had a desk there. Behind his chair, in the huge fireplace, a small fire burned even when the days were warm. "The old fool's cold-blooded as a snake," thought Dr. Hounder. French windows opened on the veranda; there was a mail-box at the corner, not six steps from the veranda rail. It was secured to a post set in the hedge that surrounded the grounds. Dr. Hounder took care to visualize this mail-box in his mind; it had a part in what he meant to do. Mr. Farraday's man servant was an old man, and, like Mr. Farraday himself, somewhat hard of hearing.

Another thing worth remembering Dr. Hounder reminded himself. He closed his eyes and visualized the living-room where he would see Mr. Farraday tomorrow morning—the door in a side wall, opposite the windows; the desk table where Mr. Farraday would be sitting; the fireplace, half a dozen feet away; the book-shelves along the wall. He weighed his plan and all his movements with some care. Only one thing needful to his success; this one thing easily managed—that the servant should be elsewhere at the moment when he, Dr. Hounder, entered Mr. Farraday's living-room.

When his plans were complete he sought out a small cardboard box of a fit size to hold the pistol; he cut out one end of this box and laid the piece of cardboard aside. Then the box itself he wrapped in stout paper and tied three ways with cord, leaving the open end free. The paper at that end he did not fold. Loose ends of the cord dangled. He tested this device to be sure it was practical; practiced inserting the pistol, adjusting the cardboard end of the box, folding the paper and tying the final knot, until his fingers moved like mechanism. Satisfied with his skill in this maneuver, he tried another—wrapped the pistol in a handkerchief and placed it in his right-hand coat pocket; sneezed, drew out handkerchief and pistol as though to blow his nose—and went through a pantomime of pulling the trigger.

There were other movements he considered and rehearsed, alone there in his office till late in the night, and

at times he talked to himself in low and contented tones. When he was satisfied with every detail, he went to bed and dozed himself to sleep.

In the morning, as a final touch, he addressed the box which would contain the pistol to John R. Hands, 23½ A Street, Lancaster, Cal. The name Lancaster he got from a map; the rest was fiction. He then weighed it, the revolver inside, and affixed the proper stamps.

About half-past nine he stepped into his car and drove toward the home of Mr. Farraday. When he approached the house he drove more slowly, passed, turned at some distance and returned; passed again. He thus waited without being conspicuous until he saw a man go in at the Farraday entrance. Thus assured that Mr. Farraday would, on his own arrival, be engaged, he drove boldly up to the house, stopped his car, got out, went up the steps, and rang. The pistol was in his right-hand pocket, wrapped up in a handkerchief; the cardboard box was in his physician's bag.

If he had personally stage-managed what followed, matters could not have gone more to his fancy. The old serving-man admitted him, told him that Mr. Farraday was engaged, and suggested that he wait in the small music-room across the hall from the living-room. Dr. Hounder told the man he need not return. "I'll just knock and go in when his caller goes," he explained, and the old fellow nodded and went mumbling toward the rear of the house.

Dr. Hounder settled himself to wait. His nerves were shaky, but he knew a remedy for that and applied it. Thereafter his senses became more alert, attuned; he listened acutely to the sounds that came from the closed room across the hall: low voices—sometimes rising—and once with a faint suggestion of heat. Farraday must, on occasion, be an irascible old man, the doctor thought.

By the by the caller departed. Mr. Farraday permitted him to find his own way to the front door, himself staying in the living-room, with the door open. It appeared he had not heard Dr. Hounder's arrival. After an interval the

physician rose, his bag in his hand, crossed the hall, and stood in the doorway.

Mr. Farraday said: "Ah, good morning, Dr. Hounder." He did not rise, and he apologized for the omission. "My old legs are a thought infirm," he explained.

Dr. Hounder reassured him. "Don't think of it, sir. Sit still." He closed the door, deposited his bag on a chair, and approached the desk. "Well, have you written?"

"I've the letter right here," Mr. Farraday replied, and drew it from his pocket. Dr. Hounder sneezed. "You've taken cold," Mr. Farraday suggested with solicitude.

The physician shook his head; at the same time, from his right-hand coat pocket and in the most matter-of-fact way, he drew a handkerchief. The folds of the handkerchief and the fact that the pistol muzzle almost touched Mr. Farraday's head muffled the explosion. Mr. Farraday tilted forward across his desk with a little thump, cured of all worldly cares and ills.

Dr. Hounder wasted no time. He laid the pistol down upon the edge of the desk and reached for the letter. Mr. Farraday's hand still clutched it; chance had it that the thing had fallen just beneath his head. Dr. Hounder instantly perceived that unless it were snatched away, there would be a damningly clean space upon the blotter where it had lain. He had it in his hand within a split second; was reassured to see that the sharp edge of the stain on the blotter was already being marred and blotted out. . . . Yet this might not be the right letter; he opened it, made sure. Into the fire. It flared there.

While he watched it burn he picked up the pistol and handkerchief, and cleaned his hand with the latter. The letter was crisping into ash. He turned toward his bag, found the cardboard box, thrust into it pistol and handkerchief, and with half a dozen swift motions closed the end and tied it.

By the time the knot was tied he stood at one of the French windows. No one was visible without. The window opened easily; he stepped lightly across the lawn and reached over the hedge and laid the parcel,

stamped and addressed, atop the mail-box to await the collector. Instantly back into the living-room again, he crossed, picked up his bag, and opened the door into the hall.

These movements occupied him, since he first entered the living-room, a scant sixty-second's time. Now he dropped his bag and ran along the hall toward the rear of the house, shouting for the serving-man. There was very realistic consternation in his tones. . . .

Dr. Hounder himself telephoned the police and volunteered to await their arrival. He was at the house when Dr. Spargent, the medical examiner, arrived, and the two professional men consulted gravely.

Dr. Hounder's story was explicit. "There was some one with Mr. Farraday when I arrived," he said. "I waited in the music-room. After a while the caller went out through the front door, but I happened not to see him, so I don't know who he was. I was about to knock at the living-room door when it seemed to me I heard voices inside, so I assumed that there was some one still with the old man. A little later I thought I heard a book drop on the floor. Nothing more.

"After a while I decided the voices had been in my imagination, and I crossed the hall and knocked. There was no reply, but Mr. Farraday was slightly hard of hearing, so this did not surprise me. I opened the door and saw him crumpled down on his desk. I started toward him, and of course saw at once that he was dead. The wound was visible as he lay.

"I summoned the man, and we telephoned. A grim thing, certainly."

Dr. Spargent nodded. They were standing just within the room where Mr. Farraday had been killed, and the medical examiner's eyes were busy. In the hall behind them a patrolman who had come with Dr. Spargent stood impassively, waiting orders. Dr. Spargent paid no heed to him; he said to Dr. Hounder: "There's no reason why you should stay. I may want to talk to you later." He knew the reputation of the eminent practitioner and respected it.

"I'm interested," Dr. Hounder replied. "Interested in what you do. And—I liked the old man."

Dr. Spargent nodded. "First thing is always photographs, with me," he said. "The eye sees even still objects in distortion; but a photograph is reasonably reliable—and permanent." He produced a camera and folding tripod from his bag and busied himself about the room, photographing the scene and body at many angles. Dr. Hounder watched, keeping in the background.

The medical examiner was not talkative, but Dr. Hounder found himself impelled to speech. He kept up a running commentary on the other's movements, a running fire of conjecture as to the murder itself—returned to his subject again and again.

"Who would have wanted to kill the old man, do you suppose?" he would ask; and, when Dr. Spargent made no reply: "He was a lovable old fellow." After an interval: "Whoever it was couldn't have gone out through the hall, or I'd have seen them. Must have come in by the window and gone that way." He crossed to the window to look out, and saw the blue-gray of a postman's uniform passing; saw the postman pause at the box on the corner to collect the mail there, and felt a burst of high relief at that—became more garrulous. The others paid him little attention. Dr. Spargent was busy, making photographs and measurements and notes; the policeman at the door held back an increasing number of people there: servants; a woman grieving aloud; a reporter or two already on the scene. Other policemen appeared, but did not enter the room. A plain-clothes man arrived and stood beside the patrolman, watching Dr. Spargent's actions with respect.

The silence of these others began to disquiet Dr. Hounder; he thought there was suspicion in their bearing. But he lifted his head with confidence that even though they might suspect—ridiculous enough—they could never prove. The pistol was safely gone; he himself had, as it were, an alibi, since he could prove he had not left the house. They could suspect on his part no slightest motive. His confidence returned.

It was at about this time that he first saw the finger-print on the edge of the desk.

Dr. Hounder had always known that criminals were sometimes detected by their finger-prints. Considering this danger in advance, he had weighed means to avoid it. Gloves? Awkward; and in themselves calculated to betray. The simple thing was to avoid leaving any prints. A relatively easy matter. If any were left, it would, after all, he possible to point out that he had been in the room the night before.

Dr. Spargent had asked him idly: "Did you touch the body after you discovered it?"

Dr. Hounder had replied: "No! I only came to the end of the desk. No need of touching it."

Dr. Spargent wished to make a photograph of the desk from the door and asked him to step back out of range of the camera. Dr. Hounder leaned against the book-shelves. The desk was between him and the light, and he saw, on its edge, the print of a finger-tip. Even on the red mahogany this print seemed to him glowing and red. He remembered his own fingers had been red when he finished handling the letter. His thoughts suddenly leaped into gear, began to race. The pistol had been lying there on the table; the handkerchief beside it. When he picked up the handkerchief to wipe his hands, one finger must have touched the polished surface. He had left his mark there. In blood! Fit to hang him!

In the silence the shutter of the camera clicked, and Dr. Hounder started at the sound. "Nervous, I guess," he said apologetically. His thoughts were racing. What to do? What to do? His whole body cried aloud the impulse to rush forward and with one sweep of his hand obliterate that damning mark, but caution held him back. Folly to betray his apprehensions. They might not remark the print at all; it might be blurred, indecipherable. He stifled panic, held himself in check, fought for a moment's clear and accurate reasoning.

It came to him, his confidence returning with it. Some way there must be, if he could find it. He had a great

contempt for these muddlers here. Dr. Spargent and his inane photographs, grisly relics of the tragedy; the plain-clothes man silent by the doorway; the flat-footed patrolman with his back repelling the crowd outside. They were beaten; he was safe—but for that faint smear of blood upon the desk top.

The print was almost invisible from where he stood; but for a slant of light which made it seem conspicuous, he would never have discovered it. It was at the very edge of the desk, and as he stared at it the thing assumed monstrous proportions, like a scar. A scar upon the wood there! A scar!

He perceived, considering this wood, the fit solution of his problem, and he laughed to himself at the perfect simplicity of it. Dr. Spargent was preparing to set up his camera at the nearer edge of the desk now; he muddled and puttered to and fro. Dr. Hounder lighted another cigaret and puffed the smoke with delight. He watched Dr. Spargent thoughtfully; at length moved forward. "Let me help you? Hold something?" he suggested.

Dr. Spargent handed him a plate holder; muttered thanks. Dr. Hounder took the thing in his left hand. After a moment he sneezed loudly. Casually enough, he took the cigaret from his lips and laid it on the edge of the desk, thus freeing his right hand to reach for a handkerchief.

He had laid the cigaret with some care exactly upon the finger-print. Standing thus directly above the spot, he could not see the print at all; but he had marked its location well, and was sure the cigaret was properly placed. His impulse, even then, was to smudge the thing; but he noticed that the dull eyes of the patrolman were upon him, and feared to arouse suspicion.

Dr. Spargent still puttered. Dr. Hounder stood patiently by, the plate holder in his hand. It was apparent that he had forgotten his cigaret entirely. It burned, a little wisp of smoke twisting upward from its end. By and by it would reach the wood, still burning, and obliterate that

damning mark. Covertly he watched it, measuring its progress. The shutter clicked; another picture done.

Dr. Spargent put up his camera, disjointed the tripod and put it away. He withdrew to the farther end of the room and sat down at a table there, collating his notes and measurements. The plain-clothes man joined him, and Dr. Hounder approached them confidently. The cigaret had almost reached the desk's edge. Three minutes more and its heat would begin to cause the finish of the mahogany to bubble and scorch. Safety three minutes away! "Anything I can do?" he asked. "I ought to move along."

Dr. Spargent said courteously: "You might tell Riley here what you told me. How you found the body there."

Dr. Hounder repeated his story with just enough variation to lend an air of truth to it. The plain-clothes man listened with downcast eyes, asking a question or two. Dr. Hounder was laughing to himself. A ridiculous thing, this; setting such men to catch clever criminals. So easily befooled! He talked mechanically on. Across the room a little thread of smoke lifted upward from the cigaret. While he talked to Riley, the plain-clothes man, he watched this smoke with secure and dreamy satisfaction. So soon as the cigaret should have burned but a little farther, he would be safe, all his tracks covered, nothing more to fear. He turned his back on the thing at last with fine indifference, gave his attention more fully to Riley's slow questions.

While they still talked together, while Dr. Spargent scratched at his notes, the policeman in the doorway left his post there; he crossed to the desk beside the dead body and looked down at the smoldering cigaret. Then he picked it up, gingerly, between finger and thumb and studied the surface of the table where it had lain. Dr. Hounder, his back turned, did not observe him.

When his scrutiny was finished, the policeman walked slowly across the room, still pinching the butt of the cigaret in his great hand, and touched Dr. Hounder on the elbow. The eminent practitioner turned.

"Here's your cigaret," said the patrolman. "It would have burned the table in a minute."

Dr. Hounder received this communication with a quite uncontrollable quiver of disappointment, which merged into alarm. He stared at the patrolman, whose eyes were blank and dull. In their very blankness the physician read a deadly menace.

Dr. Spargent had opened one of the French windows, to admit a little of the balmy morning air. Dr. Hounder could see his car, out by the gate. Not so far away.

"I looked at the table close," said the patrolman. "You didn't burn it any."

Dr. Hounder, at these simple words, gave way to panic utter and irrevocable; he struck past the dull patrolman toward that open window.

But of course these men were trained to action; they had him, quick as a terrior has its rat. There was something curiously ratlike in his abject and sudden squealings. . . .

"I was watching him," the patrolman explained slowly when Dr. Spargent questioned him. "The rest was guessing."

"A mighty good guess, O'Hearn," the medical examiner applauded.

"Not all guessing," O'Hearn confessed. "There was once I saw he was worried; and him staring at the table. Then he put the cigaret about where he'd been looking—and he didn't look to me like a man that would be careless of nice furniture. And when I picked up the butt and saw it was right on top of that finger-print, I was pretty sure what he'd meant to do."

"But it wasn't his finger-print. The maid left it when she oiled the desk this morning."

O'Hearn nodded. "That's so," he assented. "But the doc didn't know that. You heard what he said. He thought he'd made it—in blood."

"I was surprised, at that, to see the way he talked when we nailed him," Riley suggested.

"The clever ones always do the most talking in the end," replied O'Hearn.

J. D. BERESFORD

THE ARTIFICIAL MOLE

We had been discussing the X—— murder in which Hatton had been personally engaged, and I had just repeated the trite remark that the criminal always made some fatal oversight that led to his arrest.

"Not always," Hatton said, and reminded me of the famous series of murders in the late 'eighties attributed to "Jack the Ripper," who, so far as we knew, escaped scot free.

"But in those cases there was no motive in the ordinary sense," I protested. "I'll grant you that it is possible, even easy, to commit a motiveless murder and get away unsuspected."

"Well then," Hatton said, "what about . . ." and he recalled three or four well-known crimes committed in the past ten years for which no criminal has ever been brought to justice.

"Yes. One forgets those cases," I admitted.

"Also," Hatton said, "there are murders now and again which don't get reported at any length in the newspapers and that the general public know next to nothing about." He paused and smiled reminiscently.

"You're thinking of one case in particular?" I ventured.

"I am," he agreed and his smile gave place to a sigh before he continued. "You might write a novel about it. Good stuff for a novel it would be, because there was some mighty interesting psychology in it. Morbid psychology, perhaps; but based on a fundamental weakness in feminine human nature. Though that was only the beginning of it all. The weakness, the blindness you might say, only

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brought about the conditions in which the crime was possible. I've got my old notes here, and if you'll give me a couple of minutes to look them up, I'll tell you about it. I've got all the detail as clearly in my mind as ever it was, but I couldn't be quite sure of the dates without reference; and it was a case in which dates were important.

"It happened in the Spring of 1910," he began when he had rapidly run through his notes. "I was living with my mother in South London at that time, and the interested parties were known to me slightly; which was how I came to be implicated in the first instance. Two half-sisters they were, living together in furnished apartments. They had had different fathers and so different surnames. The elder one, Miss Hannah Grey, was a woman of 35 or so; a tall gaunt woman with a rough voice, and a remarkable identity mark in the shape of a big mole with a tuft of hair on it; as big as a sixpence it was, low down on her left cheek near the angle of the jaw. A terribly pious woman she was by all accounts, and a perfect dragon in looking after her little half-sister; a pretty, timid girl of twenty, who regarded Hannah as a mother, her own mother having died when she was a few months old.

"Well, it was this younger sister, Miss Rose Moore as she was then, who came to see me one Friday evening, the 8th of April to be exact, to ask my advice. "You're a detective, aren't you, Mr. Hatton?" she began and when I had told her that I *was* connected with the C.I.D., she asked me if I could advise her unofficially. I said I could so long as she did not ask me to conceal any crime, and then she came out with her story.

"According to her, Miss Hannah Grey had disappeared. She had gone down to Westbourne, on the previous 12th of March on the plea of ill-health, a colourable excuse as she had certainly been in a very nervous state before she went; hysterical now and again; and more than once her sister had heard her praying aloud in her own room in the small hours of the morning. She had gone very

suddenly at the end, too, and had left no address but Poste Restante, Westbourne.

"Miss Moore was naturally rather anxious about her, but her uneasiness had been considerably lessened by the letters she had received. She had had four in all, none of them dated except by the day of the week, and none of them giving any address. In the first, received on the 15th of March, the Tuesday after Miss Grey went away, she had made the excuse that the boarding-house she was in didn't suit her and that she might be leaving any day. In the other letters she made no further reference to where she was staying, and gave hardly any account of her doings. They were, in fact, peculiarly empty, uninteresting letters, apparently hurriedly written, but with no suggestion in them of unhappiness or distress of any kind. She said that her health had greatly improved and so far as one could judge she appeared to be, for her, unusually cheerful.

"But after the last letter dated 'Sunday' and received ten days before, on the 29th of March, Miss Grey had ceased to write. Miss Moore on her side had written several times since then to Westbourne, begging for news but had had no reply. My first enquiry was as to whether Miss Grey had any tendencies to depression of mind, such as might have tempted her to suicide; but her sister shook her head at that. "Have you any theory, yourself?" I asked, but she said she had not; and though I fancied that she had something in reserve, I did not press her just then; but turned my attention to the envelopes of Miss Grey's letters.

"Three of them were straightforward, and useless, enough; having the postmark, Westbourne, and the date, reasonably clear; but the postmark of the last letter was almost undecipherable. I could make out what looked like a UR near the end of the word and what might have been part of an E three or four letters earlier which seemed to suggest that it, also, came from the same town; but a comparison with the other postmarks showed at once that the last one had been made with a different

stamp, while the spacing of the letters implied, I thought, a shorter name. After that a closer examination under a magnifying glass gave me an F in place of an E for what was probably the first letter; and the possibility that the only other decipherable letters might be OR; an inference that was practically confirmed when I found that there was a little station called Fulford on the branch line that joins up Westbourne with St. Edmund's.

"Miss Moore had never heard of Fulford, and was quite sure that her sister had not mentioned such a place at any time before going away; but the obvious line to take was first to make a call at the Westbourne General Post-Office to see if Miss Moore's recent letters had been called for and then to make an enquiry or two at Fulford, evidently nothing more than a village in which a stranger such as Miss Grey would certainly be noticed. In fact, to cut short this part of the story, I promised Miss Moore to go down to Westbourne the next afternoon, a Saturday, and see if I could find out anything for her, unofficially.

"My own idea at that time, was that Hannah Grey had committed suicide; despite her sister's disbelief in that theory. I was nearly twenty years younger then, and a trifle too cocksure in my judgments of men and women; apt to divide them all up into types and docket them without too close an examination. I had not had a great deal of experience, you see, and what I had had was almost entirely confined to the ordinary criminal class.

"And my first call at the Westbourne Post-Office gave me no reason to alter my mind. Miss Moore's letters had been called for until Saturday, the 26th of March. The post-office clerk remembered Miss Grey as soon as I described the mole on her cheek, and was able, as it happened, to fix the date on which he had last seen her; that date being the day before she had written the last letter to her sister. The later letters from Miss Moore, five in all, had never been called for.

"Well, the way I worked it out in the little branch line train going to Fulford was that Hannah Grey had been suffering from some kind of delusion, but had been sane

enough to wish to spare her beloved half-sister the pain of knowing that she proposed to commit suicide; and had carefully laid her plans accordingly. Perhaps I was not so far out in the matter of the delusion, but as I was soon to learn, it had been of a very different kind.

"Fulford is just a small village of 500 or so inhabitants, a mile from the station and half a mile from the sea. A bleak, desolate place, set down in the marshes. A perfect beast of a little place, I thought it that afternoon, for there was a bitter East wind blowing; and not so much as a hedge anywhere to shelter you. I've called it a station, by the way; but it was only a 'halt' in those days, just one platform and a shed—it was a single line—and the guard of the train took and distributed the tickets.

"Nevertheless, Fulford, from my point of view, had certain advantages to recommend it, the chief of them being that there was but one centre of information in the village, a general shop that was even more promiscuous than the average shop of that kind, since it was Post-Office, grocers, haberdashers, stationers, bakers and everything else you can think of all in one. And the woman and her husband who kept it with the help of their son Joe, a boy of fifteen who went the rounds in a cart, were reasonably intelligent people and fairly sharp observers, though like most of the witnesses I've come across in that walk of life they chiefly noticed the things that were of little use to me in my work.

"However, they knew quite a lot about the lady I was looking for. She had drawn attention to herself from the start by coming down there at all at that time of year. But she had not stayed in the village. Some enterprising town-planner of that period had had the idea of making his fortune by building half-a-dozen small houses close down to the sea; 'Bungalow Town' he had christened it; and my friends at the shop—Robinson their name was—were his house-agents.

"Nothing in that so far, perhaps, and all helping to bear out my theory, but I got the surprise of my life when I learnt at the very beginning of my conversation that she

had come down there and had lived in one of those houses by the sea with a man. I could hardly believe it when they first told me. I had seen Hannah Grey two or three times, and knew her reputation for pious respectability; and if I had been asked who was the least likely woman I had ever known to set off on a prank of that kind, her name would have been the first to occur to me. I knew she had a bit of money of her own; and I guessed right away what the man's game had been. What beat me was how he could ever have persuaded her to go away with him. She was not a fool by any means.

"But that piece of information put another face on the business altogether; and I dropped the casual enquiry line I had begun with, showed the Robinsons my badge and gave them to understand that I wanted their evidence officially. They pulled themselves together pretty quickly when they found out I came from Scotland Yard, but I remember that their first reaction to that was to tell me that Mr. and Mrs. Gunn, as they called themselves, had paid all their bills before they went away. From first to last, the Robinsons hadn't, I believe, any suspicion that it might be anything worse than a charge of some form of swindling that I had against this so-called Mr. Henry Gunn.

"Now I'll boil down the story I got bit by bit from the Robinsons, just to give you the real essentials; and I may tell you that it was not quite the kind of story I was anticipating.

"The first part fitted well enough, however. Mr. Henry Gunn had evidently been cautious from the start. He had come down at the end of February and taken the house 'Belleview,'—that was how they had spelt it!—after a few very casual enquiries. Only one thing he had insisted upon: was there central heating from a separate furnace, because he suffered greatly from the cold? And, as it happened, that one house 'Belleview' had what he wanted; being the first that was built, and designed, it seemed, to be lived in all the year round.

"After that, Mr. Gunn was very easily satisfied; did not

want to see how the place was furnished; but took it at once without even inspecting it, paid the rent in advance until the end of March and said that he would write to tell them what day and at what time to expect him and Mrs. Gunn, and to give them all the necessary orders with reference to provisions, particularly coke for the furnace. The Robinsons were not the least suspicious of him. They were only too glad to get a good customer at that time of year. In appearance Mrs. Robinson told me, he was a man of about middle height, with a heavy black moustache, and a white skin. She thought he was probably consumptive. But she, herself, saw him only that once; and the boy, Joe, who was my principal witness, did not seem to have taken much notice of him. All he could do was to confirm his mother's description.

"So far, it all looked plain sailing with a nasty, unsavoury crime at the end of the course; but I was to be very considerably puzzled by what came after. The Gunns arrived at Fulford in the afternoon of the 12th of March, the day Hannah Grey had left London. They had a wagonette to meet them, had ordered everything in advance by letter, and drove straight to 'Belleview.' For a fortnight, they behaved as one might expect any middle-aged couple to behave in the circumstances except that Mr. Gunn never went out except to take a walk on the lonely beach. Mrs. Gunn, however, sometimes came up to the village and on three or four occasions went into Westbourne by train. They had all their provisions from the Robinsons' shop, and the boy Joe called every morning except Sunday for orders.

"Then on the 28th of March—we could fix the date without difficulty—Mr. Gunn was, according to his wife's statement—taken ill with influenza. Nothing serious, Mrs. Gunn told Joe—they never had or even asked for a doctor—but he would have to keep his bed for a few days. Now that date, you notice, was the day after that on which Hannah had written her last letter to her half-sister; and although Mr. Gunn's illness explained well enough why Hannah had not called at the Westbourne post-office there

seemed no particular reason why she should not have written. Also, Joe said that he thought Mrs. Gunn was rather 'queer' after her husband fell ill. Sometimes she called her orders from the bedroom window, sometimes pinned a piece of paper on the door. And all that time, Joe never once set foot in the house. Either he left the milk, bread and groceries in the yard, or Mrs. Gunn took them from him on the threshold of the back door.

"That puzzled me a little, but there was some still more bewildering information to come, for it seemed that Mrs. Gunn had left the place only the day before the 8th of April, going by the evening train to Westbourne, while Mr. Gunn had followed her that very morning, but had gone to town, if he had been going to town, the other way by St. Edmund's. Naturally the Robinsons had been a trifle surprised that Mrs. Gunn should go away leaving her husband all alone in the house after he had but just recovered from an attack of influenza; but she had seen no one but Joe who drove her to the station, had not been communicative and as she had no luggage, it had been presumed that she would be returning the next day.

"Mr. Gunn's departure that morning had been rather more noticeable. He had been, the Robinsons inferred, not only in a very poor state of health but, also, considerably agitated. He had been fully dressed with his overcoat and hat on when Joe had called at the house with the milk and bread at eight o'clock, had spoken to him from the bedroom window, and both then and later when he drove to the station at eleven o'clock, had worn a heavy woollen muffler which he kept over his mouth. I cross-examined the boy, Joe, fairly strictly about these facts, all of them so very fresh in his memory, but I got nothing more of any value, and if the details were a trifle suspicious in some ways, they were all perfectly consistent with what had gone before; the one surprising thing being that Mrs. Gunn should have gone off alone. 'We reckoned they must have had a quarrel of some kind,' Mrs. Robinson said and I was inclined to agree with her.

"Well, I got the keys of the house from the Robinsons and went down alone to have a look at it. I did not expect to find anything that would help me and I didn't till just as I was leaving. The house was in two storeys—all the other houses, none of them occupied at the time, were bungalows—and somewhat lightly furnished in the style of a place meant to be let for the summer season. The furnace was in the coal cellar leading out of the kitchen, but I didn't examine anything very closely. There seemed to be no reason why I should; the place was all very clean and tidy as if before she had gone away Hannah had put everything straight for the next tenant, the one exception being the bedroom in which Mr. Gunn had presumably slept the night before. Even that was reasonably neat and I noticed that the wash-basin had not been used. Either he must have washed under the tap in the scullery downstairs or not at all.

"I was just leaving the bedroom when it came into my mind to test the radiator. The house seemed warm in comparison with the cold outer air and I guessed that the furnace had not gone out very long before. And by one of those extraordinary chances that do happen sometimes in real life, I ran my fingers along the top pipe of the radiator—it was an old-fashioned tubular affair—in just such a way as to feel something between the radiator and the wall. It tickled my fingers, and I thought it was a spider; and as I have a peculiar objection to spiders, I got hold of it and hawked it out. But it was not a spider, although at first sight it looked just like one, but a very peculiar object that you will find to-day in the Criminal Museum at Scotland Yard, if you should have the curiosity to go and look for it—a round piece of black rubber about the size of a sixpence, with a tuft of hairs neatly threaded through it and fastened with spirit gum.

"Naturally, I kept that, but it wasn't until I was in the train going back to town that the explanation of the whole affair came to me. I saw it all then in a flash. Mr. Gunn had been doubling the parts of himself and Hannah for nearly a fortnight, and the first and most important

item of his disguise had been an artificial mole. The more I thought over it, the more convincingly did that theory seem to fit the facts. Going back over the Robinsons' evidence, it all came to me as clear as a pikestaff. His own temporary disappearance had been fully accounted for by his illness, which, also, gave a reason for his not having to appear disguised as Hannah except to the boy Joe; and then, except on the evening he left—when it was getting dark—only for very brief interviews. Then again he had had to keep his muffler up to his face that morning in order to conceal the fact that he had shaved off his moustache. Oh! yes everything fitted in like the pieces of a puzzle. After that, nearly all that I had to do was to discover if it had been possible for him to have left Fulford at 6.30 on the previous evening and be back there in time to get away again, as himself, by the next morning? And it was. The time-table showed me that he could have left Westbourne by the 7.10 for London; have got out at 7.50 at the first stop, Catbridge Junction, and have taken the 8.5 from there to St. Edmund's in time to catch the 9.15 on the branch line back to Fulford. Probably, I decided, he had got out at Northbeach, a station earlier and walked from there in the dark along the sands to Belleview. That itinerary presented no difficulties.

"Finally to clinch the theory, I saw only too clearly, the reason for his manœuvres. He had probably murdered the unfortunate Hannah somewhere about the 28th of March; and had spent the ensuing ten days in getting rid of the body. He had the furnace he had been so insistent upon, for the best part of the work and the calcined bones had probably either been crushed and powdered or destroyed by acid. Oh! yes! It is not so difficult to get rid of all traces of a body if you have time enough; and that was the factor Mr. Henry Gunn had planned to make sure of.

"Well, I had never a doubt that I was right, nor had my chief to whom I told the whole story, as soon as I got back to town. Indeed, he congratulated me very warmly on what I had done; and I went home as proud as a peacock. I did not see Miss Moore that night, by the

way. For one thing, I wanted to have my case complete first; and for another I did not at all relish having to break the news to her.

"So far so good, eh? And when I went down on a still warm scent in a car the next day—a Sunday, you remember, and I should never have been able to get through, if I had had to rely on the train service—I felt pretty hopeful of having Mr. Henry Gunn under observation in the course of twenty-four hours or so; though as my chief had pointed out, we might have a hard job to bring the crime home if the body had been absolutely destroyed.

"But that was where things began to go wrong. I could trace Mr. Gunn dressed as Miss Hannah Grey into the 7.10 train for town from Westbourne on Friday evening; and I got news of him in his own clothes leaving for the same destination from St. Edmund's on Saturday morning. But in both cases after he had once got into the train he seemed to have completely disappeared. Not a trace of him at Catbridge Junction or anywhere else along the line on Friday evening; nor, again, on Saturday morning. And yet he must have been a noticeable figure on both occasions.

"Well, of course, we went through 'Belleview' pretty throughly, dug up the garden, took up the floors, sifted the ashes of the furnace. But we didn't find a scrap of evidence. The job had been too thoroughly and carefully done. In fact, the only other piece of corroborative evidence we picked up, was when we went into Miss Hannah Grey's business affairs and found out that in the course of February, she had sold all her securities, drawn her money from the Bank and changed most of it into French notes at the Credit Lyonnais—notes of a hundred francs each that had not been in sequence and no record had been kept of the numbers. Must have been a nice haul for Mr. Gunn: over £5,000 in all, I calculated.

"Well, there you are, eh?" Hatton said watching me with a grim smile. "There's a case for you in which the criminal made no mistake unless you count the fact that he mislaid that artificial mole as one? Lord! how I used

to go over that affair in my mind afterwards, trying to work out how he had been too clever for us."

"And you never caught Mr. Henry Gunn?" I asked.

"Never," Hatton said. But I knew by his smile that his story was not quite finished.

"Nor heard of him?" I enquired.

"Ah! I didn't say that," he replied. "As a matter of fact, we heard all about him—ten years later. And from whom do you think?"

I shook my head. I have no gift for the drawing of inferences of this kind.

"From Miss Hannah Grey!" Hatton said.

I stared at him in complete bewilderment. "Do you mean to say . . ." I began.

"That she'd never been murdered?" he supplied. "I do mean just that, and the case has been a warning to me not to let myself be led away by fixing my mind on a theory while I'm investigating the facts. If I'd not been so sure of what had happened, I might . . . However, I'm not sorry in some ways that I made a mistake; especially as I married Miss Grey's half-sister, Miss Rose Moore. We've been married getting on for twenty years now."

"Well, aren't you going to tell me about it?" I prompted him as he paused thoughtfully on his last statement.

"Yes; I'll tell you," Hatton said, "though this part of the story isn't in my line. You see, this is where the psychology I spoke of comes in; and I'm not sure if I can make you understand it. To begin with you must know that Miss Grey had a French grandmother, her father's mother; and spent a good part of her time until she was nearly twenty, in France. And what one would never have suspected her of, in middle-age, was what you might call the undeveloped passion in her blood. Rose had guessed it. She was not surprised when I told her that her sister had gone off with Mr. Gunn. 'Oh! I was so afraid of that,' she said, and when I asked her why, she told me that it was because Hannah 'had always been so dreadfully down on that sort of thing.' Queer reason, eh? But I fancy I can understand it. What people talk of now-

adays as suppressions, Freud and that stuff. And in her case, it was all mixed up with religion which seems to have made it worse. Anyway when she did give in, she went the whole way, and then became extra pious afterwards to make up for it; turned Roman Catholic and went into a convent in Belgium. It was from there Rose heard from her. She thought she was dying when she wrote, the letter was forwarded from Rose's old address; but she lived for another twelve months after that; and Rose saw her on three occasions in all; and had the whole story at one time or another.

"Well, I can give you my side of it, but what beats me is to get the atmosphere—to describe all the agonies that unfortunate woman went through. You could make a novel out of that, but it wouldn't be very cheerful reading. You see, in the first place, she always had her suspicions of Mr. Gunn, but he charmed her somehow; he seems to have had a gift with women; and in some ways she was as weak with him as a girl of eighteen. He was the only man who ever made love to her, and I suppose there was something in her French blood that couldn't resist him.

"But to get back to the crime, it seems that I must have been right about Gunn up to a point. He must have been pretty much the kind of scoundrel I had inferred and laid the kind of plans I had attributed to him up to the point of murdering Hannah, destroying the body in the furnace, and laying a false scent by getting away in her clothes. It would not have been too difficult. They were about the same height, her voice was easy to imitate and with that identity mark of hers which always caught the attention, he might quite easily have brought it off. Only one thing, probably, prevented him. Hannah Grey got in first.

"It seems that in the course of that first fortnight at Fulford, her suspicion of him had been steadily growing, but what finally set her off was precisely the same queer piece of evidence that put me on the track—the artificial mole! She came into the room quietly one day, and caught

him sitting at the dressing-table trying the effect of it on his own cheek. And that, apart from her suspicion of him and her instant intuition of what his game was,—she was no fool—seems to have got her on the raw. A kind of vanity, perhaps? She was mad to think that he should imitate her deformity. And Gunn obviously saw that the game was up and went for her out of hand. They struggled; and she was stronger than he was, she pushed him violently back against the wall, he struck the back of his head, and was either stunned or fainted—his heart, apparently, was none too strong. And if she had tied him up and left him there to recover, she might have got away with no sin on her conscience other than that she believed herself to have already committed. But as she told Rose, 'something stronger than she was took hold of her'; a tremendous reaction against him and herself and the whole affair, I suppose. Anyway, explain it how you like, she strangled him while he was still unconscious.

"After that, came the price she had to pay for all that she had done; and a pretty severe price it must have been. You see, she was no shrewd, experienced criminal. She had no plans, and what with spending most of her time on her knees praying for forgiveness, she was in no state of mind to make any. For ten days, she lived in that house with the body of Mr. Gunn; but in between her bouts of penance, she had just sense enough to keep up appearances; give her orders to Joe every morning and destroy the food he left for them. She says that she herself ate nothing all that time. It may be true. I'm told that a wonderful clearness of mind comes to people sometimes when they are starving; and that clearness presently came to her. *She* said, of course, that spirits guided her. I would not deny that, either.

"But her inspiration was mighty near coming too late. She had started to run away on that Friday—the evening before I went down to Fulford the first time,—and it wasn't until she was sitting in the train in Westbourne station, that—what shall I say?—the impulse came to her.

Hannah, you understand, made out that it was a kind of miracle, the first step of her conversion to the Roman Catholic faith. She talked of voices, in the Joan of Arc style, of being wonderfully guided and told what she must do. Your psychologist would say, I don't doubt, that all those notions were illusions consequent upon ten days' starvation and excitement; but, to me, that only begs the question.

"However, what is certain is that she was somehow strung up to a very remarkable feat of strength and endurance. She got out of the train on the side away from the platform,—she was alone in the compartment,—made her way across the metals without being seen in the dusk, and walked back to 'Belleview' along the beach. It was two days after the new moon, there was an unusually low tide that night, and when she got back to the house, she stripped Gunn's body and somehow managed to drag it down to the sea, weight it with a couple of big stones and drown it soon after midnight, at the bottom of the ebb.

"All that time she was in a hysterical ecstasy, you understand, which seems to have upheld her for two or three days. The notions of tidying up the house, packing her luggage and Gunn's and finally escaping in his clothes, were all, according to her, instructions given her by the 'voices.' And whatever way you look at it, the luck was all running her way about that time. She had a compartment to herself on the train from St. Edmund's, and changed back into her own clothes, which was why I got no news of Gunn on that line, for I was so obsessed with the idea of looking for him that I never made a single enquiry for her.

"Well, after that the rest was easy. No passports were necessary for France or Belgium in those pre-war days; she spoke French and had plenty of French money with her. Even if I'd been looking for her instead of Gunn, I might have missed her. And she crossed by night, and managed to drop Gunn's luggage overboard in mid-channel without being seen. When she arrived in Belgium, she went straight to Louvain, because she had stayed there once in

her youth and knew of a convent in the place. She had no difficulty in being accepted into the Roman Catholic Church, made her confession, of course, presented her 200,000 francs to the convent and became the most pious nun in the place. They would have made her Sister Superior after the German occupation, but she was too humble to accept such a position. She lived for eleven years after she went to Louvain, and I fancy she was reasonably happy, though all her life was one long penance —a part of which by the way was to hold no communication with anyone in England until she believed that she was dying; not that she was greatly tempted, I expect, except in the case of Rose.

"Well, there you are, sir; that's the story of the queerest case I ever had anything to do with; a mixture of psychology, what you may call the ordinary criminal cunning and, the most unusual factor, mysticism. Personally, I don't blame myself for having been deceived. There were incidents in which it really seemed as if you could read the hand of fate. That matter of the high tide, for example, which completely wiped out all traces of the dragging of Gunn's body down the beach. To say nothing of the East wind I referred to, earlier, to do the same work with the loose sand above high-water mark. You may call it Fate, Luck, Coincidence, anything you like, but I sometimes wonder if they are not just different names for the same thing."

CAROLYN WELLS

CHRISTABEL'S CRYSTAL

Of all the unexpected pleasures that have come into my life, I think perhaps the greatest was when Christabel Farland asked me to be bridesmaid at her wedding.

I always had liked Christabel at college, and though we hadn't seen much of each other since we were graduated, I still had a strong feeling of friendship for her, and besides that I was glad to be one of the merry house party gathered at Farland Hall for the wedding festivities.

I arrived the afternoon before the wedding-day, and found the family and guests drinking tea in the library. Two other bridesmaids were there, Alice Fordham and Janet White, with both of whom I was slightly acquainted. The men, however, except Christabel's brother Fred, were strangers to me, and were introduced as Mr. Richmond, who was to be an usher; Herbert Gay, a neighbor, who chanced to be calling; and Mr. Wayne, the tutor of Christabel's younger brother Harold. Mrs. Farland was there too, and her welcoming words to me were as sweet and cordial as Christabel's.

The party was in frivolous mood, and as the jests and laughter grew more hilarious, Mrs. Farland declared that she would take the bride-elect away to her room for a quiet rest, lest she should not appear at her best the next day.

"Come with me, Elinor," said Christabel to me, "and I will show you my wedding-gifts."

Together we went to the room set apart for the purpose, and on many white-draped tables I saw displayed the gorgeous profusion of silver, glass and bric-à-brac that are one of the chief component parts of a wedding of to-day.

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I had gone entirely through my vocabulary of ecstatic adjectives and was beginning over again, when we came to a small table which held only one wedding-gift.

"That is the gem of the whole collection," said Christabel, with a happy smile, "not only because Laurence gave it to me, but because of its intrinsic perfection and rarity."

I looked at the bridegroom's gift in some surprise. Instead of the conventional diamond sunburst or heart-shaped brooch, I saw a crystal ball as large as a fair-sized orange.

I knew of Christabel's fondness for Japanese crystals and that she had a number of small ones of varying qualities; but this magnificent specimen fairly took my breath away. It was poised on the top of one of those wave-crests, which the artisans seem to think appropriately interpreted in wrought-iron. Now, I haven't the same subtle sympathy with crystals that Christabel always has had; but still this great, perfect, limpid sphere affected me strangely. I glanced at it at first with a calm interest; but as I continued to look I became fascinated, and soon found myself obliged (if I may use the expression) to tear my eyes away.

Christabel watched me curiously. "Do you love it too?" she said, and then she turned her eyes to the crystal with a rapt and rapturous gaze that made her appear lovelier than ever. "Wasn't it dear of Laurence?" she said. "He wanted to give me jewels of course; but I told him that I would rather have this big crystal than the Koh-i-nur. I have six others, you know; but the largest of them hasn't one-third the diameter of this."

"It is wonderful," I said, "and I am glad you have it. I must own it frightens me a little."

"That is because of its perfection," said Christabel simply. "Absolute flawless perfection always is awesome. And when it is combined with perfect, faultless beauty, it is the ultimate perfection of a material thing."

"But I thought you liked crystals because of their weird supernatural influence over you," I said.

"That is an effect, not a cause," Christabel replied.

"Ultimate perfection is so rare in our experiences that its existence perforce produces consequences so rare as to be dubbed weird and supernatural. But I must not gaze at my crystal longer now, or I shall forget that it is my wedding-day. I'm not going to look at it again until after I return from my wedding-trip; and then, as I tell Laurence, he will have to share my affection with his wedding-gift to me."

Christabel gave the crystal a long parting look, and then ran away to don her wedding-gown. "Elinor," she called over her shoulder, as she neared her own door, "I'll leave my crystal in your special care. See that nothing happens to it while I'm away."

"Trust me!" I called back gaily, and then went in search of my sister bridesmaids.

The morning after the wedding began rather later than most mornings. But at last we all were seated at the breakfast-table and enthusiastically discussing the events of the night before. It seemed strange to be there without Christabel, and Mrs. Farland said that I must stay until the bridal pair returned, for she couldn't get along without a daughter of some sort.

This remark made me look anywhere rather than at Fred Farland, and so I chanced to catch Harold's eye. But the boy gave me such an intelligent, mischievous smile that I actually blushed and was covered with confusion.

Just at that moment Katy the parlor-maid came into the dining-room, and with an anxious expression on her face said: "Mrs. Farland, do you know anything about Miss Christabel's glass ball? It isn't in the present-room."

"No," said Mrs. Farland; "but I suppose Mr. Haley put it in the safe with the silver and jewelry."

"I don't think so, ma'am; for he asked me was he to take any of the cut glass, and I told him you had said only the silver and gold, ma'am."

"But that crystal isn't cut glass, Katy; and it's more valuable than all Miss Christabel's silver gifts put together."

"Oh, my! is it, ma'am? Well, then, won't you please see if it's all right, for I'm worried about it."

I wish I could describe my feelings at this moment. Have you ever been in imminent danger of a fearful catastrophe of any kind, and while with all your heart and soul you hoped it might be averted, yet there was one little, tiny, hidden impulse of your mind that craved the excitement of the disaster? Perhaps it is only an ignoble nature that can have this experience, or there may be a partial excuse for me in the fact that I am afflicted with what sometimes is called the "detective instinct." I say afflicted, for I well know that anyone else who has this particular mental bias will agree with me that it causes far more annoyance than satisfaction.

Why, one morning when I met Mrs. Van Allen in the market, I said: "It's too bad your waitress had to go out of town to attend the funeral of a near relative, when you were expecting company to luncheon." And she was as angry as could be, and called me an impertinent busybody.

But I just had deduced it all from her glove. You see, she had on one brand-new black-kid glove, and the other, though crumpled up in her hand, I could see never had been on at all. So I knew that she wouldn't start to market early in the morning with such gloves if she had any sort of half-worn black ones at all.

And I knew that she had given away her next-best pair recently—it must have been the night before, or she would have tried them on sooner; and as her cook is an enormous woman, I was sure that she had given them to her waitress. And why would she, unless the maid was going away in great haste? And what would require such a condition of things except a sudden call to a funeral? And it must have been out of town, or she would have waited until morning, and then she could have bought black gloves for herself. And it must have been a near relative, to make the case so urgent. And I knew that Mrs. Van Allen expected luncheon guests, because her fingers were stained from paring apples; and why would

she pare her own apples so early in the morning except to assist the cook in some hurried preparations? Why, it was all as plain as could be, and every bit true; but Mrs. Van Allen wouldn't believe my explanation, and to this day she thinks I made my discoveries by gossiping with her servants.

Perhaps all this will help you to understand why I felt a sort of nervous exhilaration that had in it an element of secret pleasure, when we learned that Christabel's crystal really was missing.

Mr. Haley, who was a policeman, had remained in the present-room during all of the hours devoted to the wedding celebration, and after the guests had gone he had packed up the silver, gold and jewels and put them away in the family safe, which stood in a small dressing-room between Mrs. Farland's bedroom and Fred's. He had worn civilian's dress during the evening, and few if any of the guests knew that he was guarding the valuable gifts. The mistake had been in not telling him explicitly to care for the crystal as the most valuable gem of all; but this point had been overlooked, and the ignorant officer had assumed that it was merely a piece of cut glass, of no more value than any of the carafes or decanters. When told that the ball's intrinsic value was many thousands of dollars, and that it would be next to impossible to duplicate it at any price, his amazement was unbounded, and he appeared extremely grave.

"You ought to have told me," he said. "Sure, it's a case for the chief now!" Haley had been hastily telephoned for to come to Farland Hall and tell his story, and now he telephoned for the chief of police and a detective.

I felt a thrill of delight at this, for I always had longed to see a real detective in the act of detecting.

Of course everybody was greatly excited, and I just gave myself up to the enjoyment of the situation, when suddenly I remembered that Christabel had said that she would leave her crystal in my charge, and that in a way I was responsible for its safety. This changed my whole attitude, and I realized that, instead of being an idly curi-

ous observer, I must put all my detective instinct to work immediately and use every endeavor to recover the lost crystal.

First, I flew to my own room and sat down for a few moments to collect my thoughts and lay my plans. Of course, as the windows of the present-room were found in the morning fastened as they were left the night before, the theft must have been committed by some one in the house. Naturally it was not one of the family or the guests of the house. As to the servants, they all were honest and trustworthy—I had Mrs. Farland's word for that. There was no reason to suspect the policeman, and thus my process of elimination brought me to Mr. Wayne, Harold's tutor.

Of course it must have been the tutor. In nine-tenths of all the detective stories I ever have read the criminal proved to be a tutor or secretary or some sort of gentlemanly dependent of the family; and now I had come upon a detective story in real life, and here was the regulation criminal ready to fit right into it. It was the tutor of course; but I should be discreet and not name him until I had collected some undeniable evidence.

Next, I went down to the present-room to search for clues. The detective had not arrived yet, and I was glad to be first on the ground, for I remembered how much importance Sherlock Holmes always attached to the first search. I didn't really expect that the tutor had left shreds of his clothing clinging to the table-legs, or anything absurd like that; but I fully expected to find a clue of some sort. I hoped that it wouldn't be cigar ashes; for though detectives in fiction always can tell the name and price of a cigar from a bit of ash, yet I'm so ignorant about such things that all ashes are alike to me.

I hunted carefully all over the floor; but I couldn't find a thing that seemed the least bit like a clue, except a faded white carnation. Of course that wasn't an unusual thing to find, the day after a wedding; but it surprised me some, because it was the very flower I had given to Fred Farland the night before. and he had worn it in his button-

hole. I recognized it perfectly, for it was wired, and I had twisted it a certain way when I adjusted it for him.

This didn't seem like strong evidence against the tutor; but it was convincing to me, for if Mr. Wayne was villain enough to steal Christabel's crystal, he was wicked enough to manage to get Fred's boutonnière and leave it in the room, hoping thereby to incriminate Fred. So fearful was I that this trick might make trouble for Fred that I said nothing about the carnation; for I knew that it was in Fred's coat when he said good-night, and then we all went directly to our rooms. When the detective came he examined the room, and I know that he didn't find anything in the way of evidence; but he tried to appear as if he had, and he frowned and jotted down notes in a book after the most approved fashion.

Then he called in everybody who had been in the house over night and questioned each one. I could see at once that his questions to the family and guests were purely perfunctory, and that he too had his suspicions of the tutor.

Finally, it was Mr. Wayne's turn. He always was a nervous little man, and now he seemed terribly flustered. The detective was gentle with him, and in order to set him more at ease began to converse generally on crystals. He asked Mr. Wayne if he had traveled much, if he ever had been to Japan, and if he knew much about the making and polishing of crystal balls.

The tutor fidgeted around a good deal and seemed disinclined to look the detective in the eye; but he replied that he never had been to Japan, and that he never had heard of a Japanese rock crystal until he had seen Miss Farland's wedding-gift; and that even then he had no idea of its great value until since its disappearance he had heard its price named.

This sounded well; but his manner was so embarrassed, and he had such an effect of a guilty man, that I felt sure my intuitions were correct and that he himself was the thief.

The detective seemed to think so too, for he said at last:

"Mr. Wayne, your words seem to indicate your innocence; but your attitudes do not. Unless you can explain why you are so agitated and apparently afraid, I shall be forced to the conclusion that you know more about this than you have admitted."

Then Mr. Wayne said: "Must I tell all I know about it, sir?"

"Certainly," said the detective.

"Then," said Mr. Wayne, "I shall have to state that when I left my room late last night to get a glass of water from the ice-pitcher, which always stands on the hall-table, I saw Mr. Fred Farland just going into the sitting-room, or present-room, as it has been called for the last few days."

There was a dead silence. This, then, was why Mr. Wayne had acted so embarrassed; this was the explanation of my finding the white carnation there; and I think the detective thought that the sudden turn affairs had taken incriminated Fred Farland.

I didn't think so at all. The idea of Fred's stealing his own sister's wedding-gift was too preposterous to be considered for a moment.

"Were you in the room late at night, Mr. Farland?" asked the detective.

"I was," said Fred.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"You didn't ask me, and as I didn't take the crystal I saw no reason for referring to the fact that I was in the room."

"Why did you go there?"

"I went," said Fred coolly, "with the intention of taking the crystal and hiding it, as a practical joke on Christabel."

"Why did you not do so?"

"Because the ball wasn't there. I didn't think then that it had been stolen, but that it had been put away safely with the other valuables. Since this is not so, and the crystal is missing, we all must get to work and find it somehow before my sister returns."

The tutor seemed like a new man after Fred had spoken. His face cleared, and he appeared intelligent, alert and entirely at his ease. "Let me help," he said. "Pray command my services in any way you choose."

But the detective didn't seem so reassured by Fred's statements. Indeed, I believe he really thought that Christabel's brother was guilty of theft.

But I believed implicitly every word Fred had uttered, and begging him to come with me, I led the way again to the sitting-room. Mr. Wayne and Janet White came too, and the four of us scrutinized the floor, walls and furniture of the room over and over again. "There's one thing certain," I said thoughtfully: "The crystal was taken either by some one in the house or some one out of it. We've been confining our suspicions to those inside. Why not a real burglar?"

"But the windows are fastened on the inside," said Janet.

"I know it," I replied. "But if a burglar could slip a catch with a thin-bladed knife—and they often do—then he could slip it back again with the same knife and so divert suspicion."

"Bravo, Miss Frost!" said Mr. Wayne, with an admiring glance at me. "You have the true detective instinct. I'll go outside and see if there are any traces."

A moment later he was on the veranda and excitedly motioning us to raise the window. Fred pushed back the catch and opened the long French window that opened on the front veranda.

"I believe Miss Frost has discovered the mystery," said Mr. Wayne, and he pointed to numerous scratches on the sash-frame. The house had been painted recently, and it was seen easily that the fresh scratches were made by a thin knife-blade pushed between the sashes.

"By Jove!" cried Fred, "that's it, Elinor; and the canny fellow had wit enough to push the catch back in place after he was outside again."

I said nothing, for a moment. My thoughts were adjusting themselves quickly to the new situation from

which I must make my deductions. I realized at once that I must give up my theory of the tutor, of course, and anyway I hadn't had a scrap of evidence against him except his fitness for the position. But, given the surety of burglars from outside, I knew just what to do: look for footprints, to be sure.

I glanced around for the light snow that always falls in detective stories just before the crime is committed, and is testified, usually by the village folk, to have stopped just at the crucial moment. But there wasn't a sign of snow or rain or even dew. The veranda showed no footprints, nor could the smooth lawn or flagged walks be expected to. I leaned against the veranda railing in despair, wondering what Sherlock Holmes would do in a provoking absence of footprints, when I saw in the flower-bed beneath several well-defined marks of a man's shoes.

"There you are, Fred!" I cried, and rushed excitedly down the steps.

They all followed, and, sure enough, in the soft earth of the wide flower-bed that surrounded the veranda were strong, clear prints of large masculine footgear.

"That clears us, girls," cried Janet gleefully, as she measured her daintily shod foot against the depressions.

"Don't touch them!" I cried. "Call Mr. Prout the detective."

Mr. Prout appeared, and politely hiding his chagrin at not having discovered these marks before I did, proceeded to examine them closely.

"You see," he said in a pompous and dictatorial way, "there are four prints pointing toward the house, and four pointing toward the street. Those pointing to the street are superimposed upon those leading to the house, hence we deduce that they were made by a burglar who crossed the flower-bed, climbed the veranda, stepped over the rail and entered at the window. He then returned the same way, leaving these last footprints above the others."

As all this was so palpably evident from the facts of the

case, I was not impressed much by the subtlety of his deductions and asked him what he gathered from the shape of the prints.

He looked at the well-defined prints intently. "They are of a medium size," he announced at last, "and I should say that they were made by a man of average height and weight, who had a normal-sized foot."

Well, if that wasn't disappointing! I thought of course that he would tell the man's occupation and social status, even if he didn't say that he was left-handed or that he stuttered, which is the kind of thing detectives in fiction always discover.

So I lost all interest in that Prout man, and began to do a little deducing on my own account. Although I felt sure, as we all did, that the thief was a burglar from outside, yet I couldn't measure the shoes of an absent and unidentified burglar, and somehow I felt an uncontrollable impulse to measure shoes.

Without consulting anybody, I found a tape-measure and carefully measured the footprints. Then I went through the house and measured all the men's shoes I could find, from the stable-boy's up to Fred's.

It's an astonishing fact, but nearly all of them fitted the measurements of the prints on the flower-bed. Men's feet are so nearly universal in size, or rather their shoes are, and too, what with extension soles and queer-shaped lasts, you can't tell anything about the size or style of a man from his footprints.

So I gave up deducing and went to talk to Fred Farland.

"Fred," I said simply, "did you take Christabel's crystal?"

"No," he answered with equal simplicity, and he looked me in the eyes so squarely and honestly that I knew he spoke the truth.

"Who did?" I next inquired.

"It was a professional burglar," said Fred, "and a mighty cute one; but I'm going to track him and get that crystal back before Christabel comes home."

"Let me help!" I cried eagerly. "I've got the true detective instinct, and I know I can do something."

"You?" said Fred incredulously. "No, you can't help; but I don't mind telling you my plan. You see I expect Lord Hammerton down to make me a visit. He's a jolly young English chap that I chummed with in London. Now, he's a first-rate amateur detective, and though I didn't expect him till next month, he's in New-York, and I've no doubt that he'd be willing to come right off. No one will know he's doing any detecting; and I'll wager he'll lay his hands on that ball in less than a week."

"Lovely!" I exclaimed. "And I'll be here to see him do it!"

"Yes, the mater says you're to stay a fortnight or more; but mind, this is our secret."

"Trust me," I said earnestly; "but let me help if I can, won't you?"

"You'll help most by not interfering," declared Fred, and though it didn't altogether suit me, I resolved to help that way rather than not at all.

A few days later Lord Hammerton came. He was not in any way an imposing-looking man. Indeed, he was a typical Englishman of the Lord Cholmondeley type, and drawled and used a monocle most effectively. The afternoon he came he told him all about the crystal. The talk turned to detective work and detective instinct. Lord Hammerton opined in his slow languid drawl that the true detective mind was not dependent upon instinct, but was a nicely adjusted mentality that was quick to see the cause back of an effect.

Herbert Gay said that while this doubtless was so, yet it was an even chance whether the cause so skilfully deduced was the true one.

"Quite so," agreed Lord Hammerton amiably, "and that is why the detective in real life fails so often. He deduces properly the logical facts from the evidence before him; but real life and real events often are so illogical that his deductions, though true theoretically, are false from mere force of circumstances."

"And that is why," I said, "detectives in story-books always deduce rightly, because the obliging author makes the literal facts coincide with the theoretical ones."

Lord Hammerton put up his monocle and favored me with a truly British stare. "It is unusual," he remarked slowly, "to find such a clear comprehension of this subject in a feminine mind."

They all laughed at this; but I went on: "It is easy enough to make the spectacular detective of fiction show marvelous penetration and logical deduction when the antecedent circumstances are arranged carefully to prove it all; but place even Sherlock Holmes face to face with a total stranger, and I, for one, don't believe that he could tell anything definite about him."

"Oh, come now! I can't agree to that," said Lord Hammerton, more interestedly than he had spoken before. "I believe there is much in the detective instinct besides the exotic and the artificial. There is a substantial basis of divination built on minute observation, and which I have picked up in some measure myself."

"Let us test that statement," cried Herbert Gay. "Here comes Mr. Wayne, Harold's tutor. Lord Hammerton never has seen him, and before Wayne even speaks let Lord Hammerton tell us some detail, which he divines by observation."

All agreed to this, and a few minutes later Mr. Wayne came up. We laughingly explained the situation to him and asked him to have himself deduced.

Lord Hammerton looked at Arthur Wayne for a few minutes, and then said, still in his deliberate drawl: "You have lived in Japan for the past seven years, in Government service in the interior, and only recently have returned."

A sudden silence fell upon us all—not so much because Lord Hammerton made deductions from no apparent evidence, but because we all knew Mr. Wayne had told Detective Prout that he never had been in Japan.

Fred Farland recovered himself first, and said: "Now

that you've astonished us with your results, tell us how you attained them."

"It is simple enough," said Lord Hammerton, looking at young Wayne, who had turned deathly white. "It is simple enough, sir. The breast-pocket on the outside of your coat is on the right-hand side. Now it never is put there. Your coat is a good one—Poole, or some London tailor of that class. He never made a coat with an outer breast-pocket on the right side. You have had the coat turned—thus the original left-hand pocket appears now on the right side.

"Looking at you, I see that you have not the constitution which could recover from an acute attack of poverty. If you had it turned from want, you would not have your present effect of comfortable circumstances. Now, you must have had it turned because you were in a country where tailoring is not frequent, but sewing and delicate manipulation easy to find. India? You are not bronzed. China? The same. Japan? Probable; but not treaty ports—there are plenty of tailors there. Hence, the interior of Japan.

"Long residence, to make it incumbent on you to get the coat turned, means Government service, because unattached foreigners are allowed only as tourists. Then the cut of the coat is not so very old, and as contracts run seven or fourteen years with the Japanese, I repeat that you probably resided seven years in the interior of Japan, possibly as an irrigation engineer."

I felt sorry then for poor Mr. Wayne. Lord Hammerton's deductions were absolutely true, and coming upon the young man so suddenly he made no attempt to refute them.

And so as he had been so long in Japan, and must have been familiar with rock crystals for years, Fred questioned him sternly in reference to his false statements.

Then he broke down completely and confessed that he had taken Christabel's crystal because it had fascinated him.

He declared that he had a morbid craving for crystals;

that he had crept down to the present-room late that night, merely to look at the wonderful, beautiful ball; that it had so possessed him that he carried it to his room to gaze at for awhile, intending to return with it after an hour or so. When he returned he saw Fred Farland, and dared not carry out his plan.

"And the footprints?" I asked eagerly.

"I made them myself," he explained with a dogged shamefacedness. "I did have a moment of temptation to keep the crystal, and so tried to make you think that a burglar had taken it; but the purity and beauty of the ball itself so reproached me that I tried to return it. I didn't do so then, and since—"

"Since?" urged Fred, not unkindly.

"Well, I've been torn between fear and the desire to keep the ball. You will find it in my trunk. Here is the key."

There was a certain dignity about the young man that made him seem unlike a criminal, or even a wrong-doer.

As for me, I entirely appreciated the fact that he was hypnotized by the crystal and in a way was not responsible. I don't believe that man would steal anything else in the world.

Somehow the others agreed with me, and as they had recovered the ball, they took no steps to prosecute Mr. Wayne.

He went away at once, still in that dazed, uncertain condition. We never saw him again; but I hope for his own sake that he never was subjected to such a temptation.

Just before he left, I said to him out of sheer curiosity: "Please explain one point, Mr. Wayne. Since you opened and closed that window purposely to mislead us, since you made those footprints in the flower-bed for the same reason, and since to do it you must have gone out and then come back, why were the outgoing footprints made over the incoming ones?"

"I walked backward on purpose," said Mr. Wayne simply.

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